

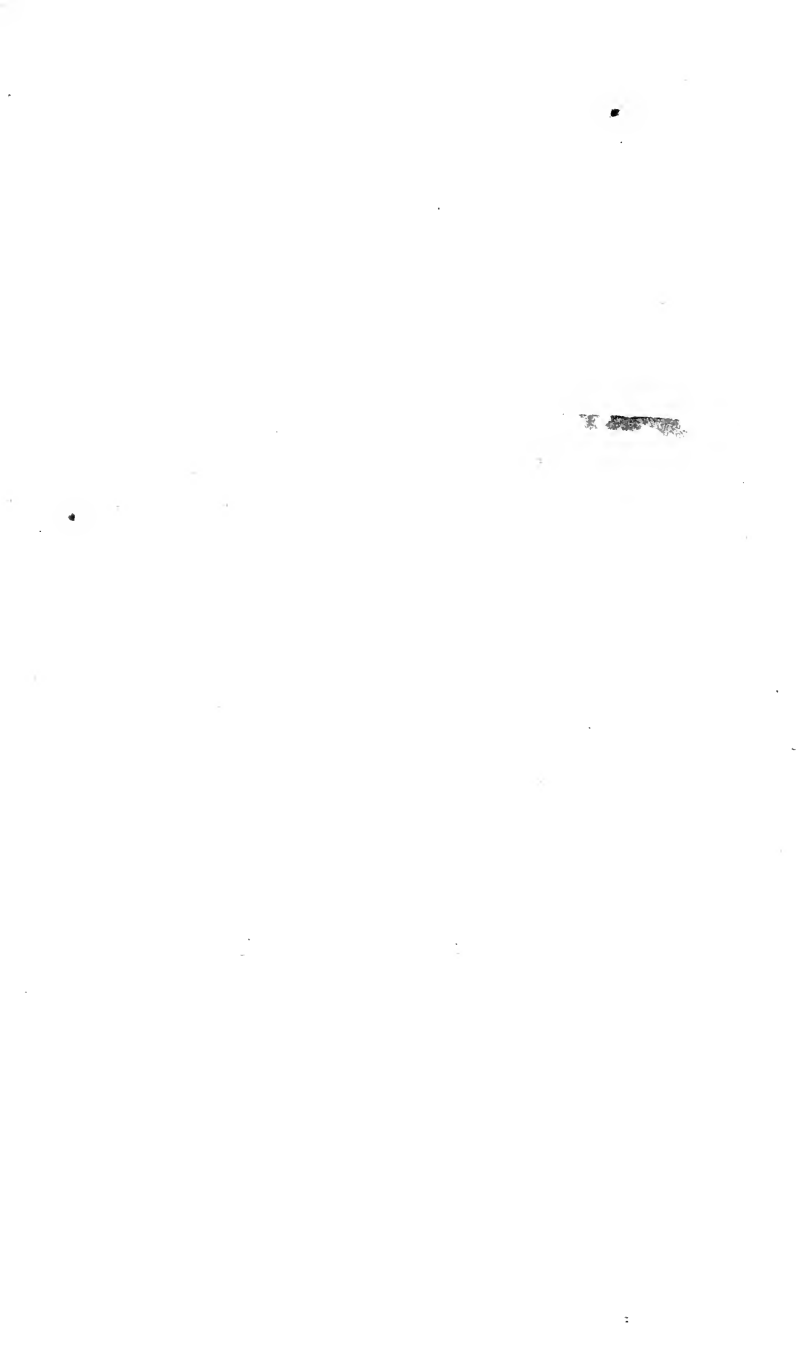
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DON JOHN.

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DON JOHN

A Story

BY JEAN INGELow

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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DON JOHN.

CHAPTER I.

SOMETIMES one who has very good cause for suspicion against another, repudiates it heartily for a long time, and obstinately holds on to a hope that it is groundless.

On the memorable day of the picnic, the day when Lancey stole the ring, his mother, as she entered her dressing-room after coming home, noticed a small piece of folded writing-paper on the floor, under her table. She picked it up carelessly; it was one leaf of a ridiculous letter from Don John to Lancey. It had been shown to her already, was full of jokes, in fact

it was droll enough to make her wish to read it a second time, and she put it in her pocket.

She had a good deal to think of just then besides parting with Lancey, and as soon as he was gone she went into her dressing-room, to revolve a little plan for producing, as she hoped, about two hundred pounds. Before she went to the picnic she had put in order all her jewellery; there was much more than she ever used. Her husband had told her of a loss he had lately had on some shares; if he would let her part with some of it, this loss would be made up without the least inconvenience of any kind.

Lancey had only been gone a few hours; her mind was still full of him, of his eagerness to get away, of the little love with which he repaid theirs—when she went up to her jewel-box again, and found to her surprise, but not to her dismay, that it was unlocked; she must have left it so,

but it was most unlikely that any one should have noticed this fact. She began gently to take out the jewellery she meant to part with, and was not in the least disturbed till she missed the ring. It had been in her hand so recently, she would not believe that it was gone; but it was not till the box had been searched a second time that the finding of that little piece of folded paper flashed into her mind, and made her feel sick at heart. She told her husband, and at first, as Lancey had foreseen, they both felt very angry with themselves for having harboured such a suspicion. It seemed a shame that they could, for an instant, believe him base enough to steal from THEM. And yet the letter had been found there—and yet the ring was gone!

He had perfectly believed that no suspicion attached to him, because, though the letters had expressed displeasure and surprise, no mention had ever been made

of this ring. But his guilty conscience accused him to such a degree when he saw Mrs. Johnstone's face, that he no sooner heard where his so-called father meant to receive him, than he gave up all for lost.

And yet, in one sense, all was not lost. Whatever he did, they would not, they could not, altogether give him up.

"I shall receive him in this room," Donald Johnstone had said of his adopted son, "and if he bears the ordeal badly—"

"Yes," she answered, "if he bears it badly, we may get him once more to confess and repent; but what if he bears it well? We cannot accuse him."

There was no need to accuse him. The deed which had been done was not named—it was taken for granted.

"Our taking this thing for granted," said Mr. Johnstone, "ought to show you how deep is your disgrace."

The adopted son hung his head; he was alone now with his parents.

“If you had been my own son—do you hear?”

“Yes, sir,” said Lancey; he did not dare to say “father.”

“If you were my own son now standing before me, and accusing his conscience of having robbed me, even me—if it had been Don John that had done this, I never would have spoken to him more; but you—you have no father—and you are unfortunate in your mother.”

He paused, appearing to hesitate; and Lancey, though very much frightened, was astonished too—he lifted his daunted face. The adopted father had turned away from him, and gone to the window. Yes, it actually was so—he perceived that he was to be forgiven.

He was intensely relieved, but he felt, almost with terror, that he could not call up that amount of emotion, and above all of deep affection, which could alone meet suitably the love and grief that he saw before him.

He bungled through this scene as well as he could.

He meant to live at home again if they would let him, and submit himself to the yoke—at any rate till he could get some more money, for he was penniless. But work and restraint were now more distasteful to him than ever ; money and idleness had afforded him ample opportunity to cultivate the knowledge of things evil, and he had done this with diligence.

He still retained a certain degree of affection for Don John, but he was so surprised by a few things incidentally said by him, that he paused to make further observations before talking confidentially to him on life, as he now unfortunately thought of it, on its fashions and experiences. He hardly knew, after a day or two, whether he looked upon Don John with most astonishment or most contempt, for he was not only very straightforward and honourable, very desirous to learn his

profession, very high principled, but he was in some respects a good and blameless youth; he had everything to learn, as Lancey thought. This was a contemptible state of things; but on the whole Lancey elected not to teach him.

Don John had something on his mind just then, he was penitent and disgusted with himself, he had begun to perceive that in plotting Marjorie's flight to Edinburgh he had very much forgotten himself, as well as what was due to her. He was much displeased also with his grandmother for having played into his hands.

He thought this over till there seemed to be no peace but in confession, and he told his mother all.

She took his confidence very calmly, and paused before answering. "Your father will be glad of this," she said at last, "for, as time went on, your want of perception in the matter has disappointed him."

"Mother! then grandmother told you?"

“Of course!—I knew perfectly that Marjorie did not in the least care for Campbell, and we agreed with your grandmother that while she stayed in Edinburgh he should never be invited to the house.”

“I’m stumped,” was all Don John replied, and he retired, feeling much relieved, and a little humiliated. “The human mind,” he reflected, “is deeper than I had supposed!”

And now Lancey was fitted out with proper clothes and personal possessions, for he had come back shabby and almost destitute; and then he was told that something had been found for him to do in London, and he was to board in the family of a clergyman, for it would not be just towards the other children that they should live at home.

He understood that he was under probation—was well aware that his host and hostess, probably his employer too, knew perfectly of his propensity. It

pleased him to receive frequent letters from “mother,” with as frequent presents of fruit, books, or the various trifles that she thought he might want or like. And sometimes “father” would send round on a Saturday to the office where he was employed, and propose to take him down with him to spend Sunday. Lancey liked this very well just at first, but he soon made many friends for himself, not by any means all of an undesirable sort; some were old school-fellows and their families, some were people whom he had met with on his travels. He had shortly a circle of his own, and seemed to take a certain pleasure in letting the Johnstones see, that as they would not any longer have him to live with them, he should make himself independent of them as soon as possible.

At present his salary was extremely small, and Mr. Johnstone paid for his board and his clothes; his pocket-money was all that he provided for himself.

There was only one thing in this world that he deeply dreaded. This man who still watched over him, and had been a true father to him, would on some rare occasions take him into his study, and after certain fatherly admonitions and counsels would kneel down and pray with him. Lancey regarded this as a very awful ceremony, so did all the children of the house. It came so seldom that it never lost its power. It was far worse, as Lancey felt, than any punishment; in fact the recollection of it actually kept him, and that not seldom, from doing wrong; but it was an additional reason for wanting to get free, to throw off the paternal yoke altogether.

So things continued for nearly a year, and all, including himself, appeared to be going on satisfactorily.

Captain Leslie had not been able yet to see Estelle's eldest son.

Early in the autumn he took a tour on

the continent, and was detained there by illness. He was almost always ill, and could not think how it was. He was prudent, he never fatigued himself ; he would like to have spent his strength, and money, and time for the good of others ; and all he could do was to care for himself.

He consulted several physicians : “ Perhaps he had better remain in the south of Europe for the winter,” said one, and he submitted, finding the charge of his own health, of himself in fact, very dull work. It was not till the hottest days of the English summer, the middle of July, that he found himself in England again, and on his way to the Johnstone’s.

He longed to see Estelle, and her son. He felt that he had almost asked for an invitation, but not the less that his welcome was spontaneous and sweet. The girls had corresponded with him, they were all charmed to see him. The mother gave him a shaded comfortable corner in the

drawing-room, and sent for some tea. She perceived at once that he was quite an invalid, and for the first time he fully admitted it—to himself. And Don John ?

Could anything be so unfortunate ? Don John was away again. He would be disappointed, for he had wished to see Captain Leslie. They did not think he had been away for nearly a year.

But Lancey—"Did he remember that they had told him about Lancey ?" asked little Mary.

"O, yes."

"He is our adopted son," said Estelle ; "we brought him up with our own children."

"But he lives with his own mother now," proceeded Mary ; "her name is Mrs. Ward, and she is come home from Australia. And Lancey has been ill, very ill ; so Don John and Mrs. Ward took him to Ramsgate for a change. Did you ever see Mrs. Ward ?"

“No ; I have not the pleasure of her acquaintance.”

“She used to be rather rich, and had the grandest rings, and the thickest chains and bracelets you ever saw ; but this is very fortunate, for she has married a very bad man, who treats her so unkindly that she ran away from him, and now she has all that jewellery to sell. She told Lancey it was worth four hundred pounds, and she keeps selling it when she wants money ; and she and Lancey live together. Lancey says he shall go to law with that man soon, but it will not be any use. Don John knows all about law, and he says so.”

“But Don John will be back in about a week,” said Mrs. Johnstone, “so you will see him.”

Captain Leslie was very well amused, falling as before into the possession of the girls, to whom Marjorie was now added. As before, he made them talk a good deal about their brother. Freddy, a fine boy of

fifteen, was at home, but he excited no interest. Don John, his doings, his writings, and the photographs of his honest face, were what pleased Leslie. He was a very joyous young fellow, as was evident—the leader of the young brood, Marjorie's confidant in her peaceful happy love affair, Naomi's comrade, Charlotte's critic, Mary's patron—looked up to by Freddy as one much exalted, but whose various doings were not beyond hope of imitation, and whose privileges might one day be shared.

He was of age now, and gave himself occasionally the airs of a man of thirty, taking it much amiss that his two grown up sisters were older than himself, and almost as tall.

However, as he frequently said, their being so tall was their own look out; he was himself quite up to the average height, in fact, half an inch taller than his father.

Charlotte and Don John, about this time were frequently seen sitting with their

heads together, in doors or out of doors, and manifestly concocting somewhat that amused them; but though Mrs. Johnstone took notice of this fact, she was not careful to influence either party in any way. The brother and sister-like intimacy, the old habit of writing "the minutes" together, kept them always familiar, but neither ever surprised the other; they were never absent, and then, uniting, saw each other in that new light which is apt to produce a new feeling.

The fact was that about this time Mr. Brown began to cultivate Don John's friendship with a certain assiduity. The young gentleman was not taken in. "It won't do," he would think; "Charlotte does not care about your prospects a bit; why must you need confide them to me?" But in their next conversation Mr. Brown with much diffidence let Don John know that he thought he might have mistaken his own feelings as regarded

Miss Charlotte, and he felt sure she did not look on him with any favour. Don John assented with needless decision, and added, of his own proper wisdom, that he was sure Charlotte was not a girl who was ever likely to marry anybody.

But there was always something curiously deferential in Mr. Brown's manner when he called upon the ladies of the family. Don John was sagacious; he felt that his society was not sought for his own sake. He had been told that it was not for Charlotte's. He consulted Charlotte. Charlotte said it must be Naomi. Manifestly she did not care about his turning away from her so soon. But Naomi would care.

And yet Mr. Brown was decidedly a good fellow. He was rather a fine young man. Would it be a good thing to let him have a chance?

Of course, if Naomi knew anything of this beforehand he would not have a chance.

They were some time reflecting on the matter, and Naomi often thought they had more conferences than usual; a dawning suspicion occasionally induced her to surprise them. They may have been adroit, or she mistaken, it was almost always "the minutes" they were discussing, for by this name all Charlotte's contributions to literature were still called.

Evidently it must have been the minutes, for if there was any conspiracy nothing came of it.

Mr. Brown frequently called; Charlotte often went out of the room on these occasions, and Naomi had to entertain him; but when Charlotte came back again it never appeared that Naomi had been well entertained.

And in the mean time Lancey was frequently in the house. He delighted to make Charlotte feel shy, and yet he saw that she resented his half-careless compliments. He would often try to squeeze her

hand, for he liked to see the pale carnation tint rise on her clear cheek ; and when she was distant to him, or when displeased, he would laugh and enjoy it. He did not truly care for her, but he would have been very well pleased to make her care for him, and he flattered himself that she did.

Leslie, true to his interest in Estelle's eldest son, was pleased to learn all he could of Charlotte and her writings.

It was the afternoon of the day when Don John was expected home ; seated where he could see the path by which he would arrive, Leslie easily beguiled her into conversation. She and Naomi were doing " art needlework," and Leslie was so fixed in his opinion that Charlotte and Don John were all in all to one another, that it surprised him when she sat down with her back to this path. All had hitherto favoured his idea, and the talk as usual came round to Don John. That afternoon, for the first time, Naomi noticed it,—started a subject

which had nothing to do with her brother, and then fell silent to observe what would happen ; but her attention wandered. She knew not how this was, but when it returned there was Don John's name again.

“ Then why does he think that story was rejected ? ” Leslie was asking.

“ Oh, because I had tried to bring in some of the old-fashioned courtesies. It is such a pity that we are obliged to do without ‘ madam ’ and ‘ sir. ’ Don’t you think so ? ”

“ I *think* I have not *thought*. So it is ; we must make the best of it. ”

“ Such expressions as ‘ my lady ’ and ‘ your lordship ’ must always have been a hideous incubus on a polite tongue ; but English has not been so pretty since we left off ‘ madam, ’ nor so terse since we parted with ‘ sir. ’ I do allow myself in conversation to use those words now and then, for the mere pleasure of hearing them, but it does no good. ”

“How do you mean, no good?”

“Oh, it does not help to bring them in again.”

“No,” said Naomi; “when you do it in society it only makes people think you know no better.”

“I fancy, madam, that their day is gone by,” said Leslie, smiling.

Charlotte sighed, as if she really cared about the matter. “We are growing so rude.”

“And so Don John counsels you to do without ‘madam’ and ‘sir’?”

“Yes, and without my theories.”

“What theory, for instance?”

“Oh, in that paper I brought in my notion that birds have an articulate language.”

“Articulate?”

“Yes, some birds; he has shown me that no creatures differ so much from one another, in point of intelligence, as birds; but I am sure some have a real language,

bank-swallows, for instance. When you hear them chattering together at the opening of their holes, does it never occur to you that if you heard any language you do not understand, such as Malay-Chinese or Hottentot, it would not sound more articulate than swallow-talk does, particularly if it was uttered as hastily and in as low a tone?"

Leslie smiled, as if he would put the question by.

She went on, "Of course their verbs must be very, very simple."

"What! you believe that they have verbs?"

"Certainly, for they possess the idea of time; they must be able to say, '*We were there,*' and '*We are here.*' And as they are perfectly aware that they shall go back again, and as they do it in concert, I think they must be able to say, '*Let us depart.*'"

"They may have signs which stand for

such ideas," said Leslie doubtfully, "as we have."

"Yes."

"And we call them verbs."

"Irresistible reasoning! and yet I resist it altogether."

"But how will you resist it? What theory will you set up instead?"

Leslie considered: "The verbs I cannot admit," he said doubtfully; "I could rather think your sand-martins have a monosyllabic language, like Chinese."

"Yes; but I don't think that idea will help you, because the latest books about Chinese show, and I think prove, that originally that language had parts of speech, verbs, and inflections; but it has gone to decay, partly from isolation, partly from the idleness of those who spoke it—from their letting their phonetic organs pass out of use. Chinese is not simple and young. It is as it were in its second childhood, going to pieces from old age."

“Indeed.”

“And you must have noticed that it is the tendency of language to have, as time goes on, a richer vocabulary and a simpler grammar.”

“You are going to found some theory on that, as regards your swallows?”

“No; but I think it likely that theirs being only a rudimentary language, what fails them most is their store of nouns—not of verbs.”

“Charlotte,” said Naomi, “Captain Leslie cannot help laughing at you.”

“Perhaps you picked up these theories from constant companionship with Don John?” said Leslie with an air of apology.

“O no; Don John is always criticizing my theories; but for him I should indulge in many more.”

“I must admit that in this one I think you claim far too much for the martins.”

“Do you think then that all their chatter

conveys no knowledge from one to the other—no intention, no wish?”

“Why should it more than the lark’s song? He pleases his mate, but he tells her nothing.”

“No, any more than we do when we sing without words; but sand-martins cannot sing—they talk. Some birds, for aught we know, can only sing. But our sense of hearing is very dull. It may be that besides singing the thrushes can say many things, and yet their speech may be too low and too small to be audible to us. Sand-martins are the only birds I know who talk manifestly and audibly.”

“Ah, here is Don John,” said Naomi, and she laid down her work, and went out at the open window to meet him.

Leslie lifted his eyes, and looking out into the garden saw a young man slowly advancing along the grass. Could this be Don John? Mary came running up to him; he stooped slightly, and she kissed

his cheek. He looked languid, and tired; and while Mary chattered and danced about him, seeming to tell him some interesting piece of news, he gazed fixedly on a bed of petunias, and with his hands in his pockets stood motionless, as if lost in thought. Naomi came near, and the two girls advanced towards the house, one on either side of him.

“Captain Leslie is here,” Naomi said, as they came up. Leslie heard this, and the answer—

“Oh!” That was all.

Rather a gentlemanly-looking young fellow, Captain Leslie thought. The extreme gravity and seriousness of his manner made his smile appear sweet; but it was soon gone again, and after the first greeting, he sank into thought.

And so this was Estelle’s son! Of how much consequence he had been to Leslie! Leslie was of no consequence at all to him.

CHAPTER II.

AMONG the minor surprises of his life, none had ever struck Leslie so much as the behaviour and air of young Donald Johnstone.

He had gathered a good deal of information as to his voice, his manners, his laugh: he appeared, and scattered it all; the picture was not like, in any respect. There was something almost pathetic in the gentleness, the serious and silent abstraction in which he sat, and, remote in thought from everything about him, cogitated with folded arms.

His light eyelashes concealed in part rather expressive blue eyes; he was pale with that almost chalky hue of a fair skin

not naturally pale. He only spoke when spoken to—and Leslie did not speak. The girls, evidently surprised, asked if Lancey was worse.

No, it appeared that Lancey was almost well again.

“Nothing is the matter then?”

“The matter! with whom?”

“Why, with you. Did you come up by the boat, Don John?”

“Yes.”

“Ah, then you were sea-sick! You always are! It is such a mistake to think that, to be often on the sea at intervals, just for a few hours will cure you.”

Oh, what a sigh for answer!

“I wish you wouldn’t do it, dear,” said Naomi, leaning over the end of the sofa on which he sat, and touching his light hair lovingly; “it has made you look so pale.”

“I’ve got a headache,” was his reply; and then, all in a moment, there was a

step heard, and the tall graceful mother came in the door. Don John roused himself, he almost seemed to shake himself, and rose up and met her, and kissed her, and seemed quite cheerful.

“My dear !” she exclaimed, “how pale you are !”

“Yes, mother !” cried Naomi ; “and he’s been on that steamer again.”

“A fellow looks such a muff,” said Don John, “if he is sea-sick. I wish to cure myself.”

Leslie looked up, and met Don John’s eyes ; he knew as well as possible that there was something more than sea-sickness the matter.

“When he got up from the sofa,” exclaimed Mary, “he staggered ; he is quite giddy.”

“There !” said Don John, impatiently ; “no more ! It’s more muffish to talk of it than to have it.”

“Yes,” said the placid mother, sooth-

ingly ; “ I’ll ring for some strong tea, and when you have had it you will be quite well.”

“ Shall I ? ” he answered ; and then he seemed to make a supreme effort again, and this time with better result.

It appeared to be almost by his own will and resolution that he cast over the matter that had held him down, and that the natural hues of life came back to his face. The tea came in, perhaps it helped him ; he ate and drank, and seemed to feel a certain comfort in his mother’s observance, so that when in the course of time Donald Johnstone himself entered, all that was remarkable in the young Donald’s appearance and manner had passed away. He was still pale, that was all. Could it be, Leslie thought, that all this pathetic air and abstracted expression had come from a mere fit of sea-sickness ? He almost despised young Donald when the thought suggested itself. But the night undeceived him.

There is something so pathetic in the anguish of the young.

Leslie had a feeling heart, and when, lying awake in the dead of the night, when the healthy and the strong should have been asleep, he heard a sound of sobbing in the next room to his, he could have wept too.

This was his heir—bemoaning himself in the night on his pillow, when he did not know that any one could hear. But the heads of the two beds were close together, one on either side of the wall.

What could it be? He was not yet twenty-two years old; could he be breaking his heart already for some woman's love? Or had he committed some grave faults, and was he craving forgiveness of his Maker? or was he sick—was he in pain?

The sobbing went on so long that Leslie almost thought he must rise and enter the young fellow's room. But no, he controlled himself; he feared to do

more harm than good ; and at last, but not till day had dawned, there was a welcome silence. Don John was asleep ; and Leslie, who had offered up many a prayer for him, fell asleep too.

Leslie did not hear that midnight mourning only once ; but for several nights there were no articulate sounds with it. Don John, though in the morning he appeared grave and dull, and though he looked pale, went every morning to London with his father, and had the air of striving to behave as usual, so that Leslie felt that to speak to him or to his parents would be to make matters worse—it would be a breach of confidence. But once before dawn, waking at a now well-known sound, he heard words as well as sighs : “ Oh, father ! Oh, mother ! ” He started up ; these were about the last words he should have expected to hear ; he could not risk being obliged to hear more.

The heir, for whom he had already begun to feel some affection, must surely be mourning

over some fault which he knew would distress his parents when they found it out. Was it not possible that he could help him? He rose, and lighting a candle, began to move about in the room without making any attempt at special quietness.

There was absolute silence. In a minute or two a tall figure in a quilted dressing gown appeared at Don John's door, shut it behind him, and came in.

He set down his candle, drew a chair, and seated himself.

"I must have disturbed you," said Don John, deeply vexed and disgusted with himself, and perhaps with Captain Leslie too.

Leslie answered "Yes ;" and when Don John made no answer, he presently went on : "And if I feel a very deep and keen sympathy with your sorrow, whatever it may be, there are reasons for that, dear fellow, which probably you never knew."

Surprise had for the moment mastered

emotion. Don John raised himself on his elbow, heaved up another great sobbing sigh, and stared at him.

“Are you aware that I have loved your mother all my life,” he went on, while Don John was considering that it was no use to say anything, he must let him alone—“all my youth—and I never had the least chance with her? A hopeless attachment, and to such a woman, is very hard discipline for a man. I say it that you may feel sure of my sympathy; but I have had faults to deplore as well. Sin has full often been standing at the door. If that is your case, feel sure of my deep sympathy there also. And now tell me—you, the much-loved son of my first and only love—if there is anything in the world that I can do for you, do you think I should be thankful to do it?”

“Yes,” said Don John, quite simply, “I think you would;” and he laid himself down again, and made no attempt to say more.

“You have got into some scrape; you have, perhaps, done something that you deeply regret, and—”

“No,” interrupted Don John, “I haven’t.”

A little thrown back by this, Leslie paused, and after a short silence the youth went on—“But I feel that what you have said is extremely kind: and perhaps now I may be able to sleep. I have not slept well the last few nights.” A hint surely to Leslie to go—but he stayed.

“Are you so sure then that there is nothing at all I can do—with my advice, my assistance, my property?”

“I am sure.”

“There remain only my prayers.”

“And they cannot help me to anything but patience.”

“My dear fellow—”

“But I am as glad you came in as I am sorry for having disturbed you, because I am sure you will promise me not

to mention this to any one—any one at all.”

“Not even to your parents.”

“That was what I meant.”

“But if I promise you this, you will owe a certain duty to me in return.”

“What duty?”

“If a time should ever come when I can help you, I shall have a right to expect that you will claim my help, to any extent and in any way.”

“Thank you.”

“And I must not ask what this sorrow is?”

“I cannot tell you.”

Leslie thought of Charlotte. She had treated him with composed indifference, but he had appeared to the full as indifferent to her. He could but speak carefully.

“I hardly like to give this matter up,” he said. “When I first loved your mother I was scarcely older than you are now.”

If there had been no other bar to my hopes, it would have been enough that I was poor. Now, if you feel any likeness in my case to yours, and if the young lady's father—I mean, if two or three thousand pounds—”

“In love with a girl!” exclaimed Don John with a short laugh, whose bitterness and scorn it would be impossible to describe, for he was contrasting an imaginary sorrow with a real one. “Fall in love with a girl, and cry about her in the night! I am not such a muff.”

“What!” exclaimed Leslie, rather shocked.

“I am not come to that yet,” continued Don John with unutterable self-contempt; ‘but perhaps I shall’—and the suddenly arrested storm asserted itself with another great heaving of the chest. Then he begged Leslie's pardon, for he saw that he was hurt. “That's not my line,” he said. “But what you say, or seem to say,

perfectly astonishes me. You are very good ; I have no claim on you in the world—and—I am sorry I disturbed you.”

“ I think you mean that you are sorry I have become aware of this.”

Don John made no answer ; Leslie turned towards his candle ; the grey light was beginning to wax, and it was burning dim.

“ I must go, then,” and he held out his hand. But the next day, when his heir came down, he deeply regretted that he had promised silence. Don John was not able to go to town ; he had low fever hanging about him, and his already wasted hands looked whiter than before.

The day after that a medical man was sent for. Don John could get up, but he complained of his head ; and in another day it became manifest that both his father and mother were alarmed about him.

Leslie’s visit had nearly come to an end—he felt that he must go ; but it was bitter to him. He longed to talk to his

heir, and offer him the best consolation that he could ; and Don John was aware of this.

In his shrewd but somewhat youthful fashion, he perceived the real affection that Leslie felt for him. He thought it would be very unfair if he did not have his innings before he went. Expressing himself in these words to Leslie, on an occasion when he was feeling slightly better, and not being understood, he explained—"I meant that I thought you would like to pray with me ; father does sometimes. I should not mind it at all—in fact, I think, I should like it."

"Out of kindness to me, dear fellow ?" asked Leslie ; but of course he took the opportunity offered. There could hardly have been anything appropriate to the peculiar circumstances of the patient in that prayer, and yet he derived from it his first conscious desire to submit—his first perception that if he could submit he could

get well. He knew that he had rebelled hitherto, and thus when the thinking-fit over this misfortune came on, rebellion was at the root of its keenest sting.

He had merely meant to be kind, and he had his reward.

He was very ill, and both father and mother lavished observant tenderness on him. Sometimes he could get up, come down stairs, and talk almost as usual. Then all on a sudden something which had been held at bay appeared to get hold on him, and low fever devoured his strength.

One day he could hardly lift his head from his pillow, but he was yet not quite in such evil case as before, for there was that in the manner of both parents which made Leslie sure that they knew now what had prostrated him.

It was very hot weather, his door was set wide open, and the family came in and out, not aware, and not informed, that there was any anxiety felt about him.

And there was little in the placid mother's manner to show that she felt any. She was generally with him. It was not so much tendance as consolation that she seemed to be giving him ; not in words. And his father, too, he spoke bravely and cheerfully ; yet the patient lost strength and flesh daily.

“As one whom his mother comforteth,” thought Leslie, when he saw his life-long love watching by his heir.

Who could fail to be consoled ? Yet Don John did not appear to derive direct comfort from their manner, only from their presence ; he could not bear to be left without either one or the other of his parents.

And yet it was he himself who had first consoled ; and he went away, and endured a very anxious fortnight, till the girls, who had promised to write frequently, could at last say that Don John was better.

With what gratitude he heard this. He was going up shortly to Scotland, and could not help proposing to stop on his way, and pay a call of one hour on the Johnstones.

There was the beautiful Estelle, and there were her tall daughters, and her invalid; he was lying on the sofa, undergoing a course of indulgence and waiting on, from all parties. His hands were thin, and as white as a girl's, his cheeks were thin, and his eyes were sunken; but the struggle was over between youth and death, and youth had won.

And yet it was not the same Don John. Leslie was just as sure of this as the others were.

His mother put down the book she had been reading to him, and looked at him with anxious love. "He must go out soon for a change," she said, "and then I hope he will be well."

"I don't want to go away, mother,"

said the young invalid; "but if I must go anywhere, perhaps Captain Leslie would have me."

The beautiful mother actually blushed; the way in which all her children took to Captain Leslie was almost embarrassing to her. She could not see any charm in him herself; but that was an old story.

Leslie was highly flattered.

She was about to say, "I really must apologize for my boy;" but when she saw Leslie's pleasure she had not the heart to do it. He looked as if he would have liked to hug Don John.

"Captain Leslie ought to have me too," said Mary; "I've done fourteen errands for him this very day, finding books for him, and fetching his eau-de-Cologne, and handing him his beef-tea, and all sorts of things."

Mrs. Johnstone did not speak, but she looked quietly at Leslie. The look was not an apology to him for not having given

him her love, but it expressed an affection she had never shown him before, and she said, "If you can have Don John" ("And me too," interrupted Mary), "my husband and I could trust you with him with more comfort than I can say."

"And me too," insisted Mary.

"Don John, and you too," answered Leslie. His mahogany-coloured face could not change its hue, but short of that it expressed all the pleasure possible.

"Invited themselves, did they?" exclaimed Donald Johnstone, when he was told of this by his wife. "My children invited themselves into this man's house, who has of all men least reason to like their father! How did he stand it? and how did you get him out of the scrape, my Star?"

"He was delighted; so I let them alone."

"Let them alone! But it will be a great inconvenience to him; very likely he

will have to get in more furniture and other servants. I believe he has a mere shooting-box."

"Yes, I felt all that, and was very much out of countenance."

"And doubtless he perceived it. I don't see how you could have done less than blush, my dear. You are actually repeating the performance, and very becoming it is."

"Perhaps he wishes that old attachment to be forgotten—perhaps he feels only friendship, now that he has seen me again."

"Perhaps!"

"Well, we must make the best of this now. They proposed the visit with the greatest composure, and he accepted with acclamation."

So in a couple of weeks Don John and Mary were in Scotland, in a moderately convenient house, wedged into one corner of a triangular valley. Its one carriage road

led down beside a prattling stream to the sea. Mary was intensely happy, and Don John was convalescent. The sensation of returning health and strength is in itself delightful, and the refreshment of clear skies, long sunsets, scented air, and mountain solitude, all helped to console and calm.

Don John gained strength daily, but Leslie did not observe any return of the joyous spirits for which he had hitherto been conspicuous in his little world. He never ventured to ask what the sorrow was, but he perceived that its cause was not removed; and sometimes there would come over the pleasant but somewhat commonplace countenance an expression which removed it into another world of feeling and experience. An ardent yearning would come over it, the outcome it seemed of some impassioned regret, which made it look more noble, if less young.

CHAPTER III.

“FATHER is ill,” cried Mary, running down one afternoon to the shore of the long loch beside which Don John was sitting, watching the little wild ducks as they crept into the shelter of the reeds; “not very ill, but rather ill. Captain Leslie has got a letter from mamma. He is better, and we are not to be at all disturbed, and not to think of coming home.”

Father ill! Such a thing had never taken place for one day in the memory of the oldest of his children.

Leslie followed closely on Mary’s message. Don John read the letter, and neither he nor his sister were so uneasy as might have been expected.

He looked at them. "They have this composure from their parents," he thought. "It was one of Estelle's great charms that she never was in the least nervous, never apprehensive."

The nearest telegraph station was fifteen miles off, and did not open till eight o'clock in the morning. Leslie had waited behind to make arrangements for having a servant there, to send a message off at the earliest moment for the latest news.

The sick man's children slept in peace. As soon as possible the next morning, an answer came from Naomi to Don John. "Father is not worse. You need not be uneasy; but mother wishes you both to come home."

Don John had been prepared for this, for his packing was found to be ready. All little Mary's effects by his decree were to be left behind, excepting what could be put into a hand-bag. Thus they were all ready as soon as the horses could be put to.

“ But why are you in such a hurry ? ” asked Mary. “ Mother says we are not to be uneasy. ”

Leslie listened for the answer.

“ And therefore I am not uneasy about father’s illness ; but he is sure to want me, and I want to go and help. ”

“ I am glad to see that you have your mother’s delightful temperament. Why indeed should you be uneasy ? why anticipate disaster ? ” said Leslie.

Don John’s eyes dilated with a startled and gratified expression. “ My mother’s temperament, ” he began, almost vehemently, and then checked himself.

“ Yes, you often remind me of her, both of you. ”

Though Leslie was driving, and the horses were rather fresh, he could not help noticing that he had produced a great effect by this speech, and that it was a pleasurable one. That his own feelings should be of the most romantic cast to-

wards Estelle, seemed to him the most natural thing in the world; but that her son should share any such feeling was, he well knew, a very uncommon circumstance. But then she was not an ordinary mother; so he presently told himself. Why then should hers be an ordinary son?

Don John lost himself in cogitation. This remark of Leslie's appeared to be such a spontaneous testimony to his sonship. Very slight, but the more sweet.

Undoubtedly his handwriting was extremely like his father's, but he had tormented himself with the thought that this might be because he liked it, had admired and copied it, as remarkably firm, clear, and round. It expressed the qualities he wished to have.

And then his manner, and the carriage of his head: he walked just as his father did. The remembrance of this consoled him just at first, but his sick fancy turned that into poison also: "I constantly

walk with father," he thought; "and when I was a little fellow I liked to go as if I was marching, because he did."

Leslie parted from Don John and his sister with much affection. Neither the son nor the daughter anticipated evil; but Don John sent a telegram on to mention at what time he hoped to reach King's Cross, and requesting that one might meet him there with the latest news.

He found all as he had expected.

His father had been ill, but was better—still in bed, and not allowed to get up.

"And you are not to ask him how his illness began," said the mother.

"But how did it begin, then?"

"That is what we do not know, my dear. We thought he had had a fall. Dumplay came home quietly, and your father not riding him."

"But that fat, old, peaceable creature could not have thrown him. Impossible, mother."

“ So I think. Mr. Viser found him sitting up leaning against the gate of the long field, and brought him home just after Dumplay came into the stable-yard. He was a little cut about the face, seemed ill, and that first day gave no account of the matter. We were told he was not to be questioned at all, or teased about it. The next day he roused himself, and said, when he saw Dr. Fielding, ‘ Now am I better ? ’ ‘ Better than I could possibly have hoped,’ Dr. Fielding answered, ‘ wonderfully better ; ’ and then, to my distress, your dear father went on : ‘ I cannot think how this came to pass.’ But we are assured that there is no danger. That evening he said he remembered dismounting and opening the gate ; he remembered seeing Dumplay walk through it, but nothing more.’ If he fainted and fell, he must have hurt his head and cut his face in the fall.” Then she put her two hands on Don John’s shoulders as he

stood gravely listening, and said, "My much loved son, what a comfort it will be that you will be with him, able to help him, and knowing all about his affairs. It consoles me to see you looking well again."

The new expression came into Don John's face then; and after that again, when sitting by his father he found that he could calm and satisfy him, and that his mere presence was doing good.

He went up to London the next day about such of his father's affairs as he could attend to, and walked home from the station through the long field. Several people out of "the houses" waylaid him to ask after his father; perhaps that was the reason why he did not notice, till he almost reached the shrubbery gate, that Charlotte was standing there waiting for him.

Charlotte. He perfectly knew Charlotte's face, and yet it was true that he

had never looked at her with any particular attention before. It was a light green gate that she was leaning on, just of the proper height to support her elbows. She was dressed in white, and had no colour about her dress at all; on her head was rather a wide white hat, limp, and only suited for a garden. Her whole dress, in short, was dazzlingly white and clean. Her small face seen under the hat was in shade; a pure pale carnation suffused her cheeks, and the lips were of the hue of dark damask roses. The same Charlotte! and yet the beautiful Irish eyes seemed almost new to him.

Don John stopped.

“I thought I would come to meet you,” said Charlotte, not moving from her place on the other side of the gate. “My uncle is so much better; he is up, and sitting in the play-room.”

This was certainly Charlotte, and yet he looked at her with wonder.

“ Well ? ” she asked with a little smile, and added, “ I knew you were uneasy, you always look so grave ; so I thought I would come and tell you that Dr. Fielding says he is more than satisfied.”

“ It was kind of you, it was good of you,” said Don John. “ What a beautiful gown you have on, Charlotte ! ”

“ This old thing,” said Charlotte, lifting her arms, and letting him open the gate ; “ why, I have had it for a year ! ”

“ Oh,” answered Don John ; and how long he would have stood gazing at her it is impossible to say, if she had not turned and moved on, saying, as she preceded him in the narrow path, “ No doubt you will want to see my uncle first ; but after that I want to consult you about something.”

Charlotte and Don John generally were consulting together about something or other ; he was always expected to criticize her essays and tales, and did not regard this as by any means a privilege, but as he

often thought, "she is not likely to marry, and therefore she ought to have something else to give a meaning to her life." On this occasion he did think of the coming consultation as a privilege, and ardently hoped that Naomi would not be present. His past thoughts were full of images of Charlotte, and for a moment he was not aware that he was looking at them with different eyes.

His father was so much better, that but for the cuts about his face it would have been difficult to be uneasy about him. These, however, reminded them how sudden the seizure had been, and made them long to know whether it was ever likely to recur. Don John had tried to discuss this in the morning; but when he found that he was put off with remarks about symptoms that he knew could be of no consequence, he said no more, but he looked so much alarmed that the friendly doctor said, "I have told you that there is no danger

—for the present. But if I allowed you to get anything out of me, your father would very soon get it out of you, and that would be bad for him. When he asks questions, you know nothing.”

“Excepting that there is something to know,” thought Don John.

Margerie was away, staying with her grandmother, as was often the case now. Dr. Fielding went on: “I would not let your sister be sent for, but I wanted you; your presence will be of the greatest use, and may be of the utmost consequence.”

Don John took easily to responsibility, guessed that his father was not to be left alone, and found a great solace in the consideration that he had so arranged his life as to have his son almost always at his side.

The dinner that evening was a very pleasant meal. The head of the family was so manifestly better that no one could be uneasy about him. A nurse was in the house, and she sat with him.

Little Mary was allowed to dine late, and was full of talk about Scotland. Don John was in better spirits than he had been since before his illness, and sitting in his father's place surveyed the family.

His mother looked tired, but peaceful and thankful. Mary and Naomi had on white muslin and blue ribbons—pink does not look well with reddish hair; but Charlotte had on pink ribbons. How much prettier pink is than blue! Her almost black hair, not glossy—how soft and thick it looked! A twisted rope of pearls was embedded in it. Her mother had just sent it to her, and at the same time some silver ornaments to Naomi. Don John did not know that, but he could not help looking at Charlotte, and she and Naomi kept glancing at one another.

“Don't they look sweet, both of them?” exclaimed the admiring little sister; and then Don John was told that the girls had put on their best to do honour to these

ornaments, which had just arrived ; and before he had reflected that he should have included Naomi in his remark, he had burst forth with “ Well, I thought I had never seen Charlotte look like that before—look so well, I mean.”

It was the end of September, remarkably hot for the time of year, and though they were dining by candle light, all the windows were open.

“ Girls always look better when they have their best things on,” said Mary. Don John glanced at both the girls ; Naomi looked just as usual, Charlotte’s appearance was really indescribable.

“ You never say anything civil, excepting to mother,” said Naomi to her brother. “ Now there was an opening for you to have said that we look well in everything.”

“ Only he doesn’t think so,” observed Charlotte.

“ No ; he often says, What a guy you look when you have a crumpled frock on ! and,

How horrid it is of you to ink your fingers!" observed Mary.

"Yes," said Charlotte, with sweet indifference; "but I'm not half so untidy as I used to be."

Don John would like to have made fervent apologies for his past rudeness; he would like to have put Naomi's hint into impassioned language, but he had just sense enough to hold his tongue; and he thought his mother's encomium very inadequate when she said, "Yes, I am pleased to see a great improvement in you, my dear; you almost always look nice and neat now."

Charlotte's cheeks blushed and bloomed; a deep dimple came. Her smile was naturally slight, but it always lifted the upper lip in a strangely beautiful way, and then the teeth showed. One never saw them but then.

Nice and neat! Go out at dawn and apply those words to a dewy half-opened

damask rose. Charlotte for her part found this praise very much to her mind, and both the girls continued to remark on one another's ornaments in a way that enabled Don John, with wholly new shyness, to glance at them. He tried to make his glances impartial, but the silver chain was only an ornament round his sister's neck. The pearls twisted in Charlotte's hair appeared to be almost a part of herself, he felt that if he might touch them they were close enough to her to be warm.

When he opened the door for them all to go out, that vision of beauty was last, and she whispered to him. "In the orchard, Don John; you won't forget?"

No, he was sure he should not forget.

He argued with himself for some minutes as to the length of time he was accustomed to sit at table.

He reminded himself that when the evenings were light he generally rose when his mother did, and strode straight into

the garden. It was rather dark now, but hot, and the air was still. He could hear the girls' voices, they were all out of doors. He could not wait any longer; he ran upstairs to wish his father good night, and then came down to give a cheerful message to his mother, who was alone in the drawing-room. After that he too stepped forth into the dark. Naomi and Mary were together; Charlotte was walking on just before them, and held a lighted candle, which she was protecting with her hand. There was no stir in the air to make it flicker. Naomi was very fond of Charlotte; when Don John teased her, she always took her part.

“Another ‘thing’ of Charlotte’s has been declined,” said Naomi—and added in a persuasive tone, “you’ve never written one word about the minutes since you went away; and I think Charlotte would like to discuss some letters she has got; you’ll ask her to read them to you?”

“Yes,” answered Don John; “what letters are they?”

“Oh, from some of her editors, no doubt; no one else writes to her. I have advised and criticized as well as I could while you were away, and now you must; but we needn’t all be there, need we?”

“No,” said Don John with an air of impartial fairness. It was a piece of hypocrisy, which for the moment he really could not help. So Naomi, as he stood still, gave him the gentlest little push towards Charlotte, who had now got on a good way before them, and with her arm over her little sister’s shoulder, turned her down another path, saying, “Well now, Mary, tell me some more about the gillies.”

Don John, like a moth, went after the candle.

He got into a long walk, sheltered on one side by the shrubbery, and at the end of it, in a small arbour where was a little

rustic table, sat Charlotte, her candle burning before her. She seemed to be poring over some letters, but as Don John drew near she folded and put them into her pocket, and sat perfectly lost in thought, till, standing in the door of the arbour, he spoke to her.

Then, to his great astonishment, she put her hand in her pocket again, drew out, not the letters, but her handkerchief, and leaning her elbows on the table, covered her face and began to cry.

“Why, Charlotte,” exclaimed Don John, “what can be the matter, dear?”

When Charlotte got into a worse scrape than usual, he generally said ‘dear’ to her, so did she to him on grave occasions—she had often done so when he was ill; what a valuable habit this seemed now.

“I told you I wanted to consult you,” said Charlotte trying to recover herself—her lovely colour had fled, her hands

trembled a little, and her long eyelashes were wet—"but I don't know how to begin," she sighed, almost piteously.

"I'll begin then," said Don John. "If that editor has declined your last thing, he is a humbug; it is the best you ever wrote."

"But he hasn't," said Charlotte.

"Oh, it's not that!"

"No, but it's everything else—it's all, excepting that."

"It's not the curate," exclaimed Don John with sudden alarm. "Surely he has not turned round again to you?"

Oh, no—of course not; then the colour came back to Charlotte's face. Don John sat down on the other chair, and Charlotte said, "If you were in my place—I mean if, instead of being the son of the house, you were (as I am) only here because my uncle and aunt are the kindest people in the world, you would understand—"

She fell silent here—he had become

rather pale. "I should understand?" he repeated.

"That I cannot bear, having never had the least chance of even showing that I am aware of their goodness—I cannot bear to put away from me a possible means of returning it, even at the risk of perhaps making myself unhappy." Then she leaned her elbow on the table again, and said with pathetic simplicity,—

"I could easily make myself love him, if I chose."

Don John made a movement of surprise and alarm, but she was thinking of far more important matters than his feelings, and went on, "But he is not good—I know he is not good—and I don't believe he really cares for me."

"Then, for heaven's sake, Charlotte—for all our sakes—don't 'make yourself love him.' Why, what does the fellow mean, that he should dare to ask it? Whom can you be talking of? who has presumed—"

She was thinking too intently to notice his agitation. "You always said, you know," she presently went on, "that I should not have lovers—and it's quite true; but there might be some one whose interest it is to marry me, particularly now. When Christmas comes this year I shall have a hundred pounds from those two editors. I am ashamed to think meanly of him, but I know—I am almost sure, he does not love me."

"Then he is even more a fool than a knave!" Don John burst out; "and you will not be so cruel to us all; you will not so make us sure that your welcome has not been warm enough here—"

"Gently, gently!" interrupted Charlotte; "but I do like to hear you burst forth in this way beforehand. When I tell you his name do not forget what you have said, for you are the only person whose opinion I have truly feared in this matter—you love him so."

Don John almost groaned; he thought he knew then what she meant. “Who is it?” he inquired.

And she whispered, “Lancey!”

CHAPTER IV.

DON JOHN looked forth to right and to left, as if casting about in the dark garden and shaded sky for somewhat to comfort or to counsel him.

Some of the stars were out. It never comforts any human soul to contemplate them; they are so changeless. And there was a crescent-moon, sharp as a sickle, and too young to give any light. The old moon had waned while he was in Scotland; sometimes he had found in this familiar show a new significance. So, his happiness had waned away—his careless joy! He was a man now, and must abide what manhood and sorrow might bring him.

And the new moon! almost as young

as this fast-waxing love. Oh, what should he do ! They would both grow.

His eyes had only just been opened to see what Charlotte was, and what she might be to him, and now she was to tell him of a lover who, of all young men in the world, he would fain not try to supplant.

“For it is not *impossible*,” he thought, with a sharp pang, “that I may already, without my own will or knowledge, have ousted him out of everything in the world that is worth having. Not *impossible*, though, as my father and mother both declare, the chances are a thousand to one against it. All that is *to me* worth having,” he continued, in mental correction of his first thought. “But though I should never call her mine, it is not fit that poor Lancey should get her.”

“That would indeed be sacrificing yourself,” he said, in a low voice.

“You think so,” answered Charlotte, in a tone of relief.

“Because, as you have said, he is not good.”

“I know he is not good,” she answered, “but he said if I would take him it would make him good. He said he was no worse than other young men, excepting in that one matter, which he declares he most sincerely repents.”

“What one matter, Charlotte?”

“Oh, the affair of—the ring.”

“He did not, of course, lead you to think that he had never erred in that way but once?”

Charlotte looked up at Don John, as he stood leaning in the doorway, with an air of such amazement that he could not meet her eyes. He turned away. Charlotte should not be sacrificed in ignorance of this, he was determined; but he knew his heart would accuse him of baseness for ever if he tried to set her against Lancey for any other cause. And then he struggled hard with himself. He knew Lancey was

on the road to ruin; that he was not in the least worthy of a lovely, pure, and high-minded girl. He could have told Charlotte things of more than one nature, which would have been quite enough to set her against Lancey for ever.

But she herself—was she not setting him an example? Why was she inclined to yield? Only because she longed to return the goodness she had experienced from those who so manifestly loved him, and for some, to her, inscrutable reason had linked his lot to theirs.

Might not Lancey, in this one matter, prove himself good and true, if he could be made so by any thing or any circumstance? But why must the experiment needs be tried with what was so precious?

The gulf when one leaps into it does not *always* close.

Don John knew well that this fancy for Charlotte, or rather that this plan to obtain her, must be a very sudden one on Lancey's

part, and with a flash of thought he felt that if he had heard of it a week ago he should certainly have blamed him in no measured terms for daring to think of her. He would have left no stone unturned to make Charlotte give up the thought of such a sacrifice—why was he not to speak now?

All this took but a minute or two to think out. Then he turned again and looked Charlotte in the face.

“I thought he did not love me,” she faltered, “because there was something so fitful and so sudden in the way that he poured forth his devoted speeches—yes, they seemed devoted for the moment—and then appeared almost to forget me and them. I believe it was nothing but an unlucky blush of mine that put it into his head that I liked him—and—I was rather near it once.”

Don John had suspected this, but he did not hear it without a jealous pang, and Charlotte went on.

“ But I think however fond you may be of Lancey—and you always used to say that you loved him better than some of your own brothers and sisters—and though, to do him justice, I believe he returns your affection, yet if you know—not that he has actually stolen anything more than once—that I do not of course suppose—but I mean if you know him to be unprincipled—”

“ But I do mean that; I do mean that he has erred in that one way more than once or twice.”

The colour flushed into Charlotte's face. “ Do THEY know it ? ” she whispered with an awestruck air.

“ Father and mother ? Yes.”

“ They never could wish me to take him then ; and yet, if he should go from bad to worse, and they should hear that I had refused him ;—they might feel what his mother wrote to me, that I was cruel, for he wanted only such an attachment to make

him all that could be wished, and I, it seemed, did not believe in his deep and abiding repentance."

"She is a base woman," exclaimed Don John. "It always makes me shudder to think of her."

"Oh, you dislike her?"

"I cannot bear her; but I am not so wicked or so unkind as to say that he does not repent; or so false as to say that I do not see in a marriage with you his very best chance of a thorough reformation."

Charlotte looked pleased—she hardly knew herself what she wished. It was sweet to think herself beloved, but yet she was inexorable in pointing out things which had made her doubt it.

"Do you know I could not help thinking when I saw his mother's letter, that it was she who had put it into his head—of course, if I was sure of his love I could not talk of him in this cold-hearted fashion."

The tone of inquiry, and almost of en-

treaty, was evident. "You have made it difficult, you know, for me to believe anything of that sort!"

Don John forced himself to say, "It was an unparalleled piece of imprudence on my part to put such nonsense into your head!"

Charlotte looked up at him, her smile increasing till the dimple came. She was pleased. "The event justified you!" she said, "and your finding it out so early did you great credit. But do give your mind to this, and your opinion about it, for you are thinking of something else. I want you to understand how queer his declaration was; and it was mixed up with remarks about my uncle, who was severe to him, he said, and about how splendidly he was getting on—he should soon be quite independent of him."

"Lancey getting on!" exclaimed Don John; "Lancey independent! How can he be getting on? I never heard a word about it. It is all since I saw him."

“I am sure he said so, and also sure that he came to ask for his quarter’s allowance. My aunt and I were both sitting with uncle, and when he saw Lancey, who came in gently, he seemed a good deal distressed.”

“My dear father! What did he say?”

“He said, ‘That’s my prodigal son: it embitters my bread to know that he will some day bring himself to want bread.’ He was a little confused after the blow on his head. Aunt Estelle took Lancey away, and then my uncle said to me, ‘I hope you will never forsake him.’ I said, ‘No.’ Well, afterwards Aunt Estelle came back, and sent me away, and Naomi and I cried together a little in the play-room. In the garden, after that, Lancey talked to me. Oh, I cannot be ungrateful! He came again the next day, and I laughed at him; and I cannot help laughing now. It seemed no more real to me than *Fetch* does! I do not know how it was, but I

did not think he talked like a lover. I thought of you."

She laughed a little nervously.

"Thought of me," repeated Don John. Her words were rather ambiguous: they made his heart beat. Charlotte turned the pearl bracelet on her arm and blushed excessively.

"I am sure it was not the right thing," she said. "He asked me to marry him—to be engaged at once; but if my uncle has been very much displeased with him, as his mother's letter seems to hint, and if Lancey is almost afraid that he should give him up, how natural that he should wish to marry into the family, and so make such a thing almost impossible. Lancey cannot get it out of his head that I love him. He never had any tact any more than I have. First he urged me to accept him on account of his love, then he as it were threatened me that if I declined it would be the worse for him. I don't think he

was considering me much ; and I formed this theory as to why he wanted me almost while he spoke."

Don John did not know what dangerous ground he was venturing on. Who could have supposed that he was not to agree with her ? He said,—

"I think that shows you do not really care much about him. You have given the verdict yourself, why ask for one from me ?"

"I do care," said Charlotte, looking dreamily at him, "and I must read you the letters." The candle was low in the socket. She began to sort them, but had hardly opened the first, when the leaping light covered her with its yellow flickering radiance, and then sank and was out. "Some other time you shall hear them," she went on. "No, I have not decided ; I could make myself marry him if I chose."

"And you might be miserable."

“Not if I saw that I was improving him, saving him, and so relieving Aunt Estelle and my uncle; only what you have just told me is such a sad surprise as almost to render that impossible which I had been trying to make up my mind to. But you speak with a kind of restraint—I am sure you do.”

“I speak like a fellow who feels that he must and will repeat and justify all he has said to the person whom it most concerns. I must and shall tell Lancey what I have said against him. And I speak, remembering how Lancey and I were bound to one another all our childhood by a great affection, which I know he depends upon to this moment.”

“And that makes you wish to be as moderate and fair as you possibly can.”

“That, and other things.”

“You will talk to him then?”

“Certainly.”

“What shall you say?”

“Would it be fair to him that I should tell you?”

“I think it would be fair to *me*. You seem to forget *me*.”

Silence here for a moment; then Charlotte put her little warm hand on Don John's sleeve, and added, “But perhaps you have no fixed thought in your mind as to what you shall say?”

“I knew before you spoke what I should first say.”

He did not lay his hand upon hers; but when she withdrew it, and said, “Tell it me,” he answered,—

“I shall first say that I am aware—at least, I know—that he does not love you.”

“You will?” exclaimed Charlotte rather bitterly. “Oh yes, of course *you* would be sure to think that; and secondly, I suppose you will say that you know he is not reformed.”

“I certainly shall.”

“But you need hardly add, for it does not matter, that you should not care to see your cousin dragged down through any foolish hope of serving yours or you; or that you see any presumption in his offer; for that, in fact, the son of an English carpenter is quite equal to the descendants of Irish kings.” Thereupon Charlotte broke down again, and began to cry with vexation, and perhaps with mortified self-love.

“I beg your pardon,” blundered Don John. “You said yourself that you felt he did not love you, or I should not have presumed—”

She had started up by this time.

“It is quite time to go in,” she remarked, interrupting him; and she stepped forth into the dusky garden, when, having dried her eyes, she presently answered some further apologetic speech by asking him some question about his visit to Scotland.

Charlotte had never had a lover in her life. She was quite capable of expressing doubt as to the truth of this one; but when it was taken for granted, by the person who should have dissipated her doubts, that he could not be true, it was rather too much for her philosophy. She would have sacrificed herself without mercy, if she had heartily believed that she was beloved; and now—well, Lancey, poor fellow, was certainly not worth having. It would have been a great convenience to this family if she could have reformed him; but since her great ally KNEW that he only wanted to make a convenience of her, all the sweetness of a sacrifice would be taken away if she made it, and only degradation and misery would be left.

Charlotte was very disconsolate the next day. So was Don John. She did not meet his efforts at reconciliation, but simply passed them over.

A woman, young, beautiful, warm-hearted, it was a peculiar mortification to her not to be beloved.

She must have lost her heart at once if she had known that any eyes found the light in hers sweet.

That there was a foolish young fellow close at hand, who found every nook in house or garden complete and perfect if she was in it, treasured up all her sayings with approval, thought the changes on her cheek more fair than the flush of sunset—she could not have believed without due assurance; but she was not to have that assurance. She never mentioned Lancey now, and she could not get over the mortification which she had, however, brought upon herself; and Don John soon knew from Lancey himself that she had refused him, and yet had so far yielded to his mother's deprecating letters as to promise that she would not utterly decide against him, she would let him speak again in the spring.

That was a long, cold, dark winter. It appeared as if the spring would never come. Don John had anxieties common to himself with all the family, and he had some which oppressed him alone. Among the first was the putting off of Marjorie's marriage. The two thousand pounds promised to his eldest daughter could not be produced without expedients which Donald Johnstone considered unjust to his other children. So he put it off till "the spring," hoping to produce it then ; but only Don John knew how this told on his health and spirits, surprised and annoyed the family of his intended son-in-law, and disappointed his daughter.

As to Don John, he groaned in secret over the assurance which had suffered him so fearlessly to interfere. If he had but left Marjorie alone !

In the meantime Donald Johnstone soon recovered from his accident, and began to resume his usual habits. He thought

himself well, and it did not come under his observation that he was never long alone.

He might have a sudden fainting fit again. He must not go to town or walk or drive alone, but quite naturally it came to pass that he hardly ever was alone. His wife saw to that when he was at home—his son always went to town with him, lunched with him, sat in the same room, and came back with him.

Such consolation as was to be got out of the increasing love of both parents Don John received that winter, but his life was dull, and time and events seemed hard upon him. A good deal more money was lost that winter; and Lancey caused Don John a world of worry, for Lancey was getting on—so his mother said; but how could this be? He was only a clerk—he had never been articted. Sometimes Don John went to see his mother, Mrs. Ward. She had possessed a good deal of handsome jewellery, and was parting with it by

degrees. She had easily persuaded Lancey that it was to his advantage to share her lodgings, and the Johnstones had not been able to prevent this. Little enough, if any, of her four hundred a year ever came to her; yet a certain air of triumph appeared sometimes in her manner, and surprised Don John, no less than did the sullenness and reserve of Lancey when he would come from time to time to see his adoptive father, and receive his quarter's allowance.

So the winter dragged slowly on. Don John had much more to do than before his father's illness. Charlotte was a good deal away with her own people, and she had soon appeared to forgive him after their unlucky conversation; but there was seldom anything to discuss as of old.

Don John knew that several letters had been written by Lancey's mother to Charlotte, and he often longed to tell her that she ought to confide the matter to his parents,

who were her natural guardians. He was sure of this, but how should he say it? why did he wish it, excepting because he knew they would not approve? No, Lancey must and should have his chance, however bitter this might be to his foster brother.

It was not till the end of March that Charlotte, who had just returned from a long visit, said to him as they were walking home from church, and a little behind the others,—

“Mrs. Ward has been teasing me again about Lancey, asking whether I consider that this is the spring. You have said that you know he does not care for me now, but I suppose you can hardly say that you know he never will?”

“No, I am not so base as to say that. But then, Charlotte, you are not so poor in affection that you do well to hang on the hope of his, if it is yet to come. There is not one person in our house that does not love you heartily.”

“More than Lancey is ever likely to do?”

“‘*Comparisons are odious.*’ I only say that we all love you heartily. My father and mother do.”

“Yes.”

“And the girls do.”

“Yes.”

“And I do.”

“Well, now you say it in so many words I remember that I have had no cause all these years to think otherwise. And yet why should you, there seems no reason?”

“There is every reason.”

A short silence here, then Charlotte looked up at him and said, “Sometimes we have quarrelled, and often we have argued together, and I have not been nice to you at all.”

Don John felt a singing in his ears, it appeared to repeat to him “Lancey—Lancey—Lancey;” he set his teeth together, and was silent.

She went on in a tone of sweet elation, "But that was because I did not know. So many people in the world who love me heartily—almost as heartily, he appeared to say, as I love them. And it sounded quite true. Now the world seems much more beautiful and happy, and I am enriched, and that other talk of Lancey's is all the more sham. I forgive you, Don John ; I am consoled, and I shall never quarrel with you any more."

Was not this the right time to speak ? If so Charlotte did not know it. She found the former speech complete.

CHAPTER V.

AND now, the very day before Lancey was expected—Lancey, who was to spend a fortnight, and do no one could tell what mischief—have all opportunity to plead his cause, and perhaps to win Charlotte, under the opened eyes of her true lover—now, when Don John, quite out of heart, almost wished himself old, that he might have lived through and forgotten the bitterness of his youth—now, while he was tossed about in twenty minds what to say and what to do—his course was suddenly decided for him. At breakfast-time there came in a telegram, setting forth that Captain Leslie was dangerously ill and desired exceedingly to see him.

Such a scramble to get him ready, that his travelling up to London in his father's company might come to pass naturally ! Such fervent thankfulness expressed by his mother that Lancey, as would be equally natural, was to be his companion for some time to come !

Nobody had much time to consider that to request Don John's presence was strange ; and as for him, he never thought about it.

So far as any comfort that he might have been to Leslie, or any counsel he might have received, he was too late. Captain Leslie was insensible, he was fast passing away ; but Don John sat in his presence for many hours of several days and several nights, and the solemnities of death came on and showed themselves, surprising both his sorrow and his love.

This would certainly be the end, whatever might come in before it. He had time to contemplate its absolute isolation as well as its majestic calm. At last one

day at dawn, while he half dozed, the doctor touched him on the shoulder. That impassive form had taken on an air of rapturous peace; he saw at once that all was over, and he shortly went downstairs, and prepared to depart.

A paper had been left giving directions about the funeral, and mentioning where the will would be found. It was at a banker's in London—Don John remembered afterwards that he had heard this said by Leslie's lawyer—and he then set forth home, thinking how little there had been in the letters from his family.

He had telegraphed, so that they knew when to expect him; and after his long journey, he approached the garden gate, through the field, about eight o'clock on an April morning.

A white figure, glorified with morning sunshine, stood and waited.

So far off as he could see her at all, he knew that it was Charlotte. Lancey was

not with her, and she did not look up. No, a sort of tender shame touched the rose-hued lips, and made the long black lashes droop. "Charlotte! Are you well? are they all well?"

"Yes."

"Where's Lancey?"

He wanted to know the worst—suspense was torture.

She only answered,—

"I thought I would rather see you at once, and—and you would have a minute to think before you met them all."

"I can easily think what it is, dear," he answered, trembling.

"No, you cannot," the colour faded from her face. "You were quite right about Lancey."

Don John drew a long breath. What did she mean? was she not come to tell him that she was engaged? She seemed to be overcome with a shy, sharp pain. "Lancey is not here," she almost whispered. "*He never came!*"

“Never came!”

“No, he wrote to uncle that he had an indispensable engagement to fulfil. Uncle was so much displeased and so much hurt: he went and saw Mrs. Ward, and she told him that Lancey had been sent into the country by his employers. But it’s false, Don John. Uncle believed the story; she said she was not at liberty to say where they’d sent him. She wrote to me the very same day, imploring me, if I knew anything of Lancey’s whereabouts, to let her know, for she feared the worst—he had run away. He had taken all his best clothes and possessions, and he had been gone twenty-four hours.

Don John, pale to the lips, looked at her, and for the moment found nothing to say, of course she knew nothing of what was passing in his mind.

“There,” she said with a little movement of her hand, as if she would put Lancey from her, “it is agreed between us that

you would say something kind to me if under circumstances of such ignominy there was anything to be said." She looked almost more distressed than ashamed.

"Don't cry, Charlotte," was all Don John found to say; he was so dumbfounded that his thoughts were all scattered abroad. "But this letter," he presently exclaimed, "what was the post-mark on it?"

"His mother says he left it behind, with the envelope not fastened. She read it, and not knowing what better to do, sent it on without comment or explanation."

"Of course he has not written to you?"

"No, and uncle has not been told what Aunt Estelle and I dread, for I went at once and related all to her; and we have had a miserable week, for there was no one to go up and down with uncle. Happily he is well, and you are come home, so that trouble settles itself. I do not forget that you too have had a solemn and anxious week. But I have not told you half about

Lancey yet. He has changed his name, as his mother tells me, and that bodes no good, I am sure. But, Don John, this is not the only scrape we are in." She had dashed away her tears now, and an air almost of amusement came into her face. They were emerging from the cherry orchard by this time. The starry celandine was glittering all over the grass, and the cherry blossom was dropping on Charlotte, when she turned, and standing still for the moment, "Yes, we two," she went on, "and nobody else."

"Not Mr. Brown's affair?" exclaimed Don John.

"Here they all are coming forth to meet you! Yes, Don John, Mr. Brown's affair. This time, I suppose he thought he had better not conduct the matter personally; he got his father to write to my uncle. The old Canon seemed therefore to think his consent very doubtful, but he wrote politely; gave some hint, I believe, that

his fortune was small, but spoke of his high respect for uncle; and said that in about ten days he should be in the neighbourhood staying with the vicar, and if by that time the young lady had made up her mind to accept his son, he hoped to be asked here, to make her acquaintance and assure her of a welcome."

"And Naomi?"

"O, Naomi! when my uncle showed her the letter she did not attempt to disguise her delight."

"What on earth is to be done?"

"When I consider how we encouraged his modest hopes, how we set him before Naomi in the best light! Oh—"

"Why it is not without the greatest difficulty that father will be able to produce the two thousand pounds he promised to Foden with Marjorie. It will be years, if ever, before he can give the same to another daughter. Oh! what a fool I have been."

“You must not meet them with such an air of consternation. You must make the best of it.”

“But there is no *best*. It’s all my own doing. I have already brought father into pecuniary straits, and now I am going to make Naomi miserable.”

And thereupon they all met.

It was not an occasion when smiles could have been expected, but even the parents who shared all their anxieties with Don John were surprised at what Charlotte had called his consternation.

Marjorie was present; she looked serene now, the day for her wedding was fixed, her fortune was to be ready, and she little knew at what a sacrifice.

And Naomi was present.

Don John was very fond of Naomi; when he saw her face he felt a lump rise in his throat. It was all his own doing! What had they said to her? Perhaps they had told her the whole truth, that she was

dowerless; perhaps they had only hinted at a long engagement. What was it that she knew? Well, he could never forgive himself; he had meddled, and he had his reward.

“I’ll sit down,” exclaimed Don John suddenly; “I don’t feel as if I could breathe.”

His mother was at his side instantly. He was close to a bench, and she took him by the arm.

He sat down and battled with the lump in his throat.

“I dare say he has been up for two or three nights,” observed his mother, “and perhaps has had nothing to eat for hours.”

“I’m all right,” said Don John, almost directly, and the whirling trees seemed to settle down into their places, so did the people.

A strange sense of disaster and defeat was upon him. And Charlotte was gone.

He felt with a pang that though Lancey was off, Charlotte had never spoken of him in a tone of such pity, nor to himself with such unconscious indifference.

But presently here was Charlotte again, in one hand a roll, in the other a glass of red wine. He had time to notice her solicitous haste; two or three drops of the wine had flowed over the brim. There never was such a precious cordial before; he clasped the little hand that held it, without taking the glass from her, and she held it to his lips; a delightful thought darted into his mind.

He was quite well again. He looked up at her as she leaned towards him, and she whispered, "Never mind, perhaps it will all come right in the end."

A prophetess of hope, how lovely she looked as she stepped aside! He often thought of her words afterwards; just then they only meant kindness, the consolation was only in her good intentions. And so

she stepped aside, and Mary came running up with a telegram, addressed to Donald Johnstone, Esq., the younger.

Donald Johnstone, Esq., the younger, took it in his hand and turned it over. His mother was beside him, and the others were grouped before him as he sat.

He really for the moment could not take his eyes from Charlotte's face.

At last he read the telegram; and then he looked at her again. His air of helpless astonishment was almost ridiculous—Charlotte thought so—that dimple of hers showed it. It was very sweet.

“ Well? ” exclaimed Marjorie.

Then he read the telegram aloud. It was such an important one that they forthwith forgot to notice how he was behaving. It ran thus:—

“ Sir,—The will has arrived, and we look to you for orders. You are respectfully requested to return for the funeral,

the deceased Captain Leslie having left you his sole heir."

Nobody had a word to say. Each one looked at some one of the others.

Don John presently rose, and in absolute silence they all walked in to breakfast.

Don John was relieved to find all the blinds of the breakfast-room down, he was in a state of elation which he felt to be almost indecent; he was trying hard to conceal it, and hoped that the green gloom, made by these blinds would help him.

It was not about his inheritance; no, that was astonishing, but hardly yet understood. It was not that Lancey seemed to have given up Charlotte; no, for Charlotte was distressed at it—how much distressed he could not yet be sure. It was because he had felt that morning a momentary faintness. Such a thing had never occurred in his life before; but just as he felt as if about to faint, a flash of

ecstatic pleasure at the thought completely restored him.

“I should not wonder,” he said to himself, with boyish delight and pride, “if I’ve got a heart complaint; and if so, I’m all right. I *must* have inherited it from father. I’ll never give myself an uneasy moment about that cruel woman’s story any more.”

He had been up four nights, and had travelled many hours without food—he wished to give these facts their due attention; and while he ate his breakfast he got deeper and deeper into cogitation over them, all his people letting him alone. At last, but not till breakfast was nearly over, he began to look at Charlotte and Naomi. Naomi was so pale, and Charlotte was so nervous, and so perturbed.

He longed for time to talk to them, but if he meant to go back to Scotland there was absolutely none to be lost.

"Time's up, my boy," said Donald Johnstone. Perhaps he was a little disappointed, considering the pecuniary straits, which had all been confided to his son, that not one word was said to him in private before the young man started off.

As to the mother, she was more than distressed, she was almost displeased. He had scarcely mentioned Leslie. He meant to go, and not first tell her anything of the solemn days he had spent. He would give her no chance of telling him anything of Lancey. She had wished so sorely to consult him about Naomi.

Even when he kissed her, he was so lost in thought that he gave no answering glance to hers that seemed to wonder and to question him.

No, before the morning meal was quite over, he was off; and she went up to her own room to look at him as he went down the long field, running rather than walking.

It was an unsatisfactory parting. In

the two or three letters that followed it hardly anything was said. The meeting at the end of a week was quite as strange. He came in unexpectedly, just before dinner, and the whole evening he seemed to be fencing off any discussion. Then, before his sisters had withdrawn he fell asleep in the corner of the sofa, and soon took himself off to bed, tired out, as it seemed, with travel and with business.

But the next morning Don John was up as early as usual, and his father heard him bustling about. It was a brilliant morning, and Don John was taking out basket chairs, and placing them under a certain tree at the edge of the orchard. After breakfast he said, "Won't you spare this one day for talk, father? Don't go to town; you have never said one word to me yet. Why, you don't even know what was in the will, though I did let you know how absolutely, and without conditions, all comes to me."

“So be it; I will stay,” answered Donald Johnstone.

“I have made a place in the orchard,” said Don John. “I could tell you and mother best out of doors.”

His mother finding herself included, took up her work and a parasol, and followed.

“It will be less awkward for me to do it there,” he went on.

“Less awkward, my boy,” repeated the father. “Why should it be awkward at all?”

There was silence after this till they reached the three basket chairs, which he had set into the shadow of a young lime-tree. The parents seated themselves. The son threw himself on the grass at their feet.

“It’s more than you expected,” he said, looking up at them. “There’s seven thousand pounds in different investments, and then the land is worth at the very least ten thousand more.”

“That is more than I expected.”

“And I suppose, father, though it is left to me as Donald Johnstone, the eldest son of Donald Johnstone and his wife Estelle, I suppose no one can dispute it with me.”

“No, my son; no one can dispute it, since I acknowledge you. I do not care to hear you bring forward that subject. It can only give us pain.”

“But I consider that if this inheritance had come to me before I was of age, it would have been your business, and your right, to say what should be done with it.”

“I don’t catch your meaning.”

“There are two, if not three courses, that you might have pursued, or at least wished to pursue, and I should have had nothing to say against any of them.”

“Well?”

“You might have wished that it should all be equally divided between me and Lancey—money and land.”

The father made no answer.

“Or you might have wished that I should give, or leave the land, to Fred. (for that is in my power), and that I should divide the money with Lancey.”

Still no answer.

“Or you might have wished that I should keep it all.”

“Yes, I might have wished that you should keep it all.”

“And yet it was left me for my mother’s sake.”

The father and mother fell silent here. What more indeed could be added to all that they had felt, or even to the little that they had said?

“I owe a great deal to Captain Leslie,” said Don John, after a long pause. “When I was so ill, he came and prayed for me. I did not like it, but afterwards I could not help thinking about it. How anxious he was to console me. I thought I should die of misery. He could not make out

what the misery was, but he suffered it too for mother's sake."

"I know he felt for us."

"And he said he knew I was under the shadow of a great grief, but that if I could trust God, He could turn it into a ground of consolation. He said, take this grief and lay it in the Saviour's hands. He will show its other side to you, and you shall not feel its bitterness any more."

"Good people," said his mother, "have said like things to me;" and she remembered how she had felt when the doubt about her child first fell on her: "this, at least," she had said "could never be made a blessing in disguise."

"Well," continued Don John, "I used to lie and think that no fellow had ever been so basely used; but after that prayer of his, I felt suddenly consoled by the very last thought that you would have said could have in it any consolation."

“Why should you think of that time at all? You are our dear son.”

“I like to think of it now. He was a very curious man. He spoke to our Saviour that night just as if he was sending up a message by Him to the Almighty Father which was sure to be duly delivered. They were very reverent, but yet they appeared so intimate—those things that he said; and he spoke of his love for mother, as if it was perfectly well known up there, and as if they pitied him.”

“His love for mother.” She had not been able till his last days to give Captain Leslie even a moderate degree of kindly liking in exchange for his love; but now she sat back in her chair, and covered her face with her hand. An almost unbearable pang smote her, and made the tears course down her cheeks. She could not get beyond the thought that he was hidden away in the dark, and she was out in the bountiful sunshine of early summer, there

was such a peaceful spreading forth of young green leaves about her. It was so well with the world; but he was gone, and she had not been kind enough to him. She longed to get away from any sense of death and darkness for him, and said to her son, "I cannot bear more of this; tell me about Leslie's prayer."

CHAPTER VI.

DON JOHN looked at his mother. "Why are you distressed?" he said. "What Captain Leslie wanted was to comfort me. I soon let him know that he had done it. He took the sting out of that cruel story that he knew nothing of."

"Then he had his reward," remarked Donald Johnstone.

He and his son hardly ever so much as mentioned "that cruel story," against which Don John had at first raged, and then fallen sick. Both parents had done all they could to comfort him, and inspire him with their own intense belief that he was theirs.

"It was a base lie," continued Don

John. "You told me to think so; and you said the chances against my not being your own son were a thousand to one."

"Yes, my boy, a thousand to one against it in fact, and far, far more than that in our opinion and feeling. I feel always, that nothing could ever disturb the fatherly affection which belongs to you, quite as much as to any of my other children."

"But I thought it was so hard that such a tale should have been told to me," said Don John. "I hated it, and that woman, and could not get well because I raged against her so. But it stole into my mind all at once as he prayed for me, that I was not unfortunate after all, for by those nine hundred and ninety-nine chances I certainly had all I wanted—all the right in you and mother, in this brother, these sisters, and this home, that I could have; but that there was yet that one other chance to be thought of. It should not be

left out altogether, faint, and slender, and slight as it was. If that one of the thousand chances was mine, how then? Had I any quarrel against my life, and grudge against my destiny then? It was not so; then I had all. It was so; and then the most singular piece of good fortune had fallen to me that was ever in the lot of man!

“But father, how good you have always been to me—more than most fathers you have let me know all your affairs; you have even consulted me; and I should not like—I mean, I do not like to surprise you.”

He had surprised both parents now, but though he looked confused and shame-faced, he laughed. Then taking off his “chimney-pot” hat, he remarked on its being such a queer thing to wear in the country, but it was the only black one he had; and he smoothed it with his sleeve, and appeared to examine the band of crape upon it with interest. It was a transparent device for gaining a little time.

"As *he* chose to leave this property to me," he began, and then came to a dead pause.

"Well?" said his father.

"Of course it's mine," continued Don John, after a very long pause.

"That's rather a flat conclusion to your speech," said Donald Johnstone, and laughed himself.

"Of course it would seem only natural that I should consult you about it."

"It would indeed!"

"Yes, father, I am glad you could laugh. I believe you will trust me. I am sorry—I am dressed in a little brief authority you see, and mean to use it—I am sorry, but I cannot consult you at all."

"I always told your mother you were a very odd young fellow."

Don John looked up at him, "Like father like son," he murmured, but not at all disrespectfully.

"What, sir! do you insinuate that I am

an odd fellow too? But take a little time to consider, my boy, before you do anything, or promise anything. I hope you are not proposing in your own mind anything Utopian."

"Have I not always lived in Utopia? What could have been more Utopian, father, than your conduct and mother's, unless indeed it is Captain Leslie's?"

"Take a little time," repeated the mother.

"Not till I have told you, which I want to do at once, that poor Lancey must not have any of it."

Rather a surprised silence here. He presently went on, "Because that would not be just to mother, and the younger children.

"But I wanted to tell you at once, father, that two thousand pounds of the money is absolutely at my own disposal at this moment. We shall want it for Marjorie."

"We!" exclaimed his father.

“Yes, thank God,” said the mother. “Let him alone, Donald. What better with it could he do?”

“You know very well with what difficulty, and at what a disadvantage you were, to borrow it. Marjorie’s dower is to be paid down by me to-morrow.”

“Yes,” repeated the mother, “quite right. Let him alone, Donald; let him show himself your true son.”

“Only,” continued Don John, “nobody knows that you have done anything Utopian, father, and we cannot afford to have people talk as if I had; so you will have to accept the money from me by deed of gift, and forthwith settle it on her; and neither she nor any one else must know.”

The father drew a long breath, and found not a word to say, the relief was so opportune, the advantage so great.

“And then there is Naomi,” continued Don John. “I do not believe the old boy (well, I mean him no disrespect; he has a

right to expect what his son has no doubt told him you were to give to your other daughter), I do not believe he would welcome her without it. I make over another two thousand pounds at once to you. I hereby declare the fact; and to-morrow, when the Canon calls, I hope that matter will be settled."

"Stop, my boy, it is too much for you to despoil yourself of."

"Me—for me to despoil myself of!—What does that mean?"

"I did say to you that I did not wish Lancey to have any of this—"

"Yes."

"Then I cannot either."

"Wait a minute," exclaimed the mother. "I foresaw this; but, my dear boy, decide nothing more at present; do wait."

"I will delay to tell you, mother, if you please."

"Do advise with us," she repeated tenderly.

“I have made a vow that I would not, but I will delay.”

“A vow, not that you would do this or that, but only that you would not consult us?”

“Yes, mother, that I would not consult you.”

“I do not care to wait, then ; so far as your decision is made, I wish to know it.”

“Mother, you must not be vexed. I decide, that when Fred is of age, he is to have the house, and the farm, and the land.”

“And you think *that* would not cause talk, and appear strange?”

“Not if my father takes me into partnership at the same time.”

“And are you really proposing all this only that Lancey may not feel himself agrieved?”

“No, mother, and yet it is mainly on Lancey’s account ; but we have no time to talk any more.

A gleam of amusement lighted up Don John's eyes. A tall girl was ushering into the orchard a fat old divine. Blushing, and very becomingly shy, she came slowly forward, he waddling beside her. Don John had met her that morning on the stairs. She looked pale, drooping, dull. Don John in brotherly fashion, which means with intimate and somewhat bluff kindness, devoid of chivalry, and devoid of deference, had kissed her, and whispered in her ear, "Don't mope, Nay. I'm sure it's all right."

A light leaped into Naomi's eyes.

"How do you know?" she replied. "I thought it was all wrong; father—"

"Well, father?" replied Don John, following her into the play-room.

"Father said almost as much as that he hoped I should not be disappointed if—if it could not be arranged."

"And why shouldn't it be arranged?" said Don John, with a stolid air.

Naomi's face took on a soft blush of pleasure.

"I wish you had been at home," she said naively; "I have been so miserable. I thought father meant that he could not give me the same fortune he is giving Marjorie, and I was afraid—Oh, I knew Canon Brown depended on my having it."

"There's no occasion to think of such a thing," exclaimed Don John; this in a whisper, "Mark my words, father will lay down the two thousand pounds like a brick."

"He will be able then? dear father!"

"You'll see."

So now Naomi was seen between the trees, sweet in her maidenly dignity, and trying hard not to show in her manner that she supposed this to be more than an ordinary morning call. She came on, and as her father and mother rose and advanced to meet their guest, Don John accompanied them far enough to bow to him; then,

bestowing on his sister something uncommonly like a wink, he gravely withdrew, or, as he would himself have expressed it, "sloped."

He had a great deal to think of, and many things to do which were not likely to be as easily arranged as Naomi's dower. Naturally he was drawn to the house, for there Charlotte was. The play-room was generally given up to her in the morning, and as he came round he looked up at the window, and saw her as she sat writing.

He entered the room, and when he shut the door behind him, she said, "I knew you would come as soon as possible." Don John had hardly time to feel agitated and pleased before she went on—"I hope you will not be disappointed; there is nothing more to tell you about Lancey; neither his mother nor I have heard any thing of him." Her mind was too full of Lancey just then to admit anything else, so it seemed; but presently she looked up,

and as if surprised at something that she saw, contemplated Don John for a few moments with a musing expression in her deep blue eyes. He was at once very much out of countenance, but she did not notice this. She said, with the downright straightforwardness of a sister, "I'm sure Marjorie is right; you look different. We never used to think you were at all—I mean particularly—good-looking when you were a boy."

An implied change of opinion gave Don John unfeigned delight. He tried to hide it. "No; but, as Mrs. Nickleby said of Ralph, you two used always to declare, 'but it's an honest face.'"

"Yes," said Charlotte, and went on, O so dispassionately, "but I always liked it; I mean, I liked the look of you." Here she folded her arms on the table, and leaned forward, as if about to dismiss that subject for something of real interest. "But have you heard anything?"

she went on; "do you think that anything can be done?"

Don John succumbed at once. There was only one way to interest her—it was to talk of his rival! To do him justice, he was almost as much distressed for her as for himself; and Lancey—he had the best reason to know that Lancey cared for her nothing at all.

"Yes, I have heard a good deal," he began; and went on, making a pause between each sentence, as if not to overwhelm her with the waves of a too sudden disaster, "I did not mean to tell you just yet. If anything can be done, I am on the look-out to do it. Lancey is gone away to America, and does not intend to return. I have seen his mother."

"Seen her! oh, where?"

"As I stood by the grave during Captain Leslie's funeral I felt as if something obliged me to look up; I did, and there she stood among the bystanders. Lancey

was gone! He had written taking leave of her, and saying that he should never see her again. He has changed his name also, and desired her to tell his old friends that it was useless to try and communicate with him. And yet she wished to follow; she had heard of my inheritance, and came and asked me to give her thirty pounds. I did, but I begged her at least not to sail till she had given him time to write, in case he changed his mind."

"And she did not tell you why he is so urgent to leave his own country for ever?"

"She could not; she knows of no reason at all."

"She does," said Charlotte, indignantly; "she does know!"

"What! have you seen her too? has she told you anything?"

"No; but before you came home from Scotland the first time, I told you that she had written to me. In that letter she said

she had too much reason *to fear that it was the old story*. Almost by the next post she wrote again, and begged me to return that letter, telling me that she felt she had made some groundless charges; she desired to have both her letters, and I sent them back to her, hoping against hope. But if Lancey is really off, and really in hiding, as I consider he is if he has changed his name, I cannot hope the best—I fear the worst.”

“I never thought of this,” said Don John, quite aghast; “but I have known for some time that he plays high. I thought he had got himself so crushed under the weight of these shameful debts of honour that his only chance was to fly.”

“How distressed Aunt Estelle and my uncle will be if it is anything worse.”

Two large tears had gathered in Charlotte’s eyes, and now they trembled on the long, dark lashes.

“And the mother said nothing more,

but only asked you to give her this thirty pounds?" she continued.

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Don John, "she said a great deal more!"

In fact, this is what had occurred; Mrs. Ward had reminded Don John that his father had always said the two boys should be equally well off. She did not see "but what his wish ought to be binding on Mr. Don John—to divide all honestly. She might not see her way to keep silence any longer," she observed, "unless she had his promise that this should be done."

To her great surprise Don John laughed scornfully at her, and defied her, bidding her do her worst. Look at me," he exclaimed, almost in a passion, "look straight into my face and tell me whether if you were my mother it would be possible for me to dislike you as I do. Look at me, I say, and if there's any truth in you speak it out and tell me how you hate the sight of me. Is that possible to a mother—that?"

“I didn’t mean to put you out,” she faltered. “It was only when you made as if you’d shake hands with me that I—”

“That you shrank! you trembled from head to foot. You can’t bear me. And now hear this, I would rather all the world knew your base story—I would rather all this property was sunk into the sea than that it should go to pay the debts of an inveterate selfish gambler.”

“Mr. Johnstone always made out that he had a claim;” she was very much frightened by this time, and perfectly pale, but she still dared him.

“A claim!” repeated Don John. “Oh, yes, a fine claim! You know best what it amounts to. But granted that he had the utmost claim—granted that he was the son, the eldest son—is this prodigal son, who has run away twice from his family, disobeyed his father, and disgraced himself, is he to be allowed *more than any other prodigal would be* to share this property with the younger

children, and lay it out in paying for his vices."

"You needn't be in such a passion, sir. I'm a poor weak woman, but it's my duty to speak up for my Lancey. He's the only creature I've got in the world to love." She spoke in a faltering tone, but no tears came. She was too much frightened for that. "Aint it his right to have any of it then?" she went on. "Mr. Johnstone would say very different, I know."

"Lancey shall never touch a shilling of it," exclaimed Don John, "unless I utterly change my mind."

"Well then," she cried, flaming up, "I will say it's hard. It was a shame to bring him up like a gentleman and then leave him in the lurch, and you used to pretend you were so fond of him."

"Yes, I did, and do. There is nothing that is not unjust which I would not do to save him even now."

“I don’t care to hear talk like that,” she answered, rising, but trembling so that she could not get away, as she had meant to do. “I shall go to Mr. Johnstone; he was always Lancey’s friend—”

“And so am I. I hope to help him. There is hardly anything I long for so much.”

“I hate to hear such hypocritical talk,” she cried out, almost more angry than he had been. “Don’t tell me what you long for—and do nothing. I don’t like it.”

“Then,” he answered, with a bitterness that surprised to the point of calming her, “I will tell you something that you WILL like.” Here, however, he fell into a musing fit, and paused.

“Yes, sir,” she faltered, “something that I shall like?” All this time she had kept the purse in her hand which contained the thirty pounds; she now slipped it quietly into her pocket. She wished to defy

him to the utmost, but not to give him his money back.

He lifted up his face, and went on: "This property—I have decided that as I cannot share it with Lancey, I cannot keep any of it for myself."

Though she had been so angry with him she was shocked when he said this, and experienced a keen sensation of shame. This was not Don John's fault, nor Lancey's either. It was all hers. Did she dislike him heartily enough then to be glad that he must forfeit his inheritance? And did he know it? *Something that YOU WILL LIKE.* It was of no use denying it, he read her better than till this moment she had read herself.

"I shall keep nothing in my own power," he added, "but the disposing of it."

Now, indeed, she had nothing to say, and she shed a few contrite tears.

Don John went to the window and stood cogitating when Charlotte asked him

whether Lancey's mother had said anything more. He revolved the conversation just detailed in his mind, but did not see what he could do, or what others could do, supposing that Lancey really was off. A man cannot be followed to America and made to pay falsely-called "debts of honour." And Charlotte seemed to be taking his utter withdrawal with very consoling calmness.

In fact she had taken up her pen, and was beginning to write.

He turned suddenly : yes, she was writing, and she took no notice when he came and sat down opposite to her at the table.

He went and fetched a little box of pens. He had a sort of notion that he should like to break a certain matter to Charlotte; how was he to begin ? He came again, and began to pull out the pens from the great play-room inkstand. Such a sorry lot they were. The girls were all by nature untidy; sometimes they put them down without wiping them. Interesting pens ! crusted

with dried, rust-like ink. Charlotte so often had one or another of them in her little tanned and dimpled fist.

Don John had already put a fresh steel point into every one of the holders excepting the one Charlotte held. He was naturally rather neat with his possessions. He glanced at her as often as he dared—she often pouted slightly and knitted her brow when she wrote. Of course, as he remarked her she became conscious of it—people always do. She noticed his occupation, and that all the holders were clean excepting the one she held—Don John had rubbed them with a piece of blotting paper. The inkstand had been put to rights, and looked quite creditable.

It was rather a narrow table; Charlotte put her pretty hand across—with the one old pen in it, and Don John seized it and looked at it. Now? No, not now—some other time. He could not kiss her hand—he did not dare.

Charlotte was a little ashamed of the pointed way in which, as she thought, he had called her attention to her inky fingers. She snatched away her hand, and rushed out of the room to wash it.

“What a calf I am!” said Don John to himself in unutterable self-abasement. “Why didn’t I do it then?”

There was company to luncheon that day—very important company. Canon Brown and his son were present, and were made much of.

The next time Charlotte went into the play-room she saw two large new pen-wipers on the inkstand, each with a gold tassel.

CHAPTER VII.

DON JOHN was not present at luncheon on the occasion of Canon Brown's visit; he had gone up to London, to see if he could find Mrs. Ward or any traces of her. But he could not; she had gone from her late lodgings, and left no address.

She had said nothing to him when she had hunted him up in Scotland, as to why Lancey was off. Whether he had lost largely at play, and was gone to hide his head abroad; or had won largely, and was gone to spend his ill-gotten gains, was what Don John could not decide. But now this third reason for his absence forced itself on his foster brother's attention. That he had been getting⁴ on—that is, that he generally

had plenty of money—might be owing to play; there were several families of the better class in whose houses he often visited, and was known to play high; he was much sought after, for his manners were charming. But his mother's hint about "the old story" could only mean, if it was true, that he had been a thief again. If so, he might be followed to America and brought back, and, spite of all the love and care, and all the prayers that had been expended on him, he might yet be a disgrace to his bringing up. The miserable story might yet come out, and in the most public and painful way.

Don John was marching off to the station after his unsuccessful inquiries. He wanted to catch the train which would take him home in time for dinner, when he heard some one calling after him, and a lad caught him by the arm.

"What is it?" cried Don John, not best pleased. The lad pointed to a man with

a monkey under his arm; he looked like an acrobat—perhaps a Christy Minstrel. “He called to me ‘*That gen’leman has lost somethin’*,” said the lad, and he passed on.

The man had come up, was almost close to him. Don John had instinctively slapped his pockets—his watch was safe, and his purse. He darted a look at the supposed acrobat; he was a fellow of about the middle height; he had on a shirt made of pink flannel, a pair of white duck trousers; he wore an old barrister’s wig; his face was chalked, and he had a triangular patch of black on each cheek, and one of brick red on his nose.

He tapped his wig with his forefinger and whispered, “You notice it.” It was tied under his chin with blue ribbon.

Don John heard the bell ring and the train start, but he stood as if spellbound. “I’ve been hanging about between this and father’s chambers looking out for you

for nearly a week," muttered the acrobat, "and I'm half starved."

If Don John had stared at the patched and painted face for hours he would not have recognized poor Lancey. But the wig, and a long scarf that he had dressed himself up in, had been used time out of mind in the play-room at home for acting charades. These he recognized at once. "What does it mean?" sighed Don John, drawing in his breath with a gasp, and his legs shaking under him. "What on earth is to be done?"

"There's a policeman," muttered Lancey; "he'll tell me to move on. *Good gen'l'man, give us a copper to buy the monkey his nuts.*"

"Now you move on," said the policeman, just as had been foretold; "you're not wanted here."

Lancey, who seemed very footsore, accordingly moved on, with a limping gait; and Don John noticed the direction, and

followed him as soon as he could do it without exciting attention.

“What on earth does it mean?” he repeated when he ventured to pass him and speak, for they had got into a quiet back street.

“You go into that shop and buy a tract,” said Lancey, “and I’ll tell you.”

“A tract I said,” he repeated impatiently, “and give me a shilling, do.”

Don John produced the shilling; Lancey darted into a cook’s shop, and presently came out with cold meat and bread in his hand. Don John was looking into the shop he had pointed out (it was a depôt of the Tract Society), and trying to marshal his scattered wits. “Buy tracts,” whispered Lancey as he limped past him.

There was nothing for it but just to do as he was bidden, and he presently came out with some tracts in his hand.

“Now we can talk as long as need be,” said Lancey, who was eating ravenously.

“ Since I have been rigged up in this way, city missionaries and Gospel fellows often offer me tracts. Look out and keep your wits about you, do ! There, offer me one. If there is no obvious reason for such as you are talking to such as I seem, it will excite attention, and I shall be spotted, and perhaps nabbed.”

As he hurried through this speech, Don John offered a tract to him : but the monkey sitting on his shoulder was quicker than Lancey. He put out his weazened hand, to the very great delight of some passing children, and snatched it, then turning it over smelt it suspiciously, after which he rolled it up into a tight ball, and persistently tried to get it into Lancey’s mouth. There was soon a little crowd ; poor Lancey groaned.

“ Go on,” whispered Don John ; “ I’ll not lose sight of you.” The crowd gathered and followed with delight, halfpence were forthcoming, and the children took it amiss

if he did not stop while the monkey received them in his little hot hand. It was almost sunset, and Lancey's strength was nearly spent, when, getting a little beyond Horney, they reached some green fields and got over a stile, finding themselves alone at last.

Lancey threw himself upon the long grass among the buttercups. Don John had bought some food and a bottle of beer as they walked; he made him eat and drink, after which poor Lancey lifted himself up, and they walked together through the deep meadow grass, and sat down on the small bank on which grew a tall hawthorn hedge.

Their disaster seemed to be too deep for any words of comfort on one side or of explanation on the other.

"Oh, don't," groaned poor Lancey piteously; "I haven't cried since this happened, wretched as I have been—and if you do! Oh, how shocking it all is, how hateful!" Then they both broke down utterly;

the one wept with a passionate storm of sobs, the other weakly and piteously, like a tired child. These two still had such an amount of affection for one another that the misfortune had to be borne in common.

Lancey hoped now that something might yet be done for him, and while the stars came out, and the summer dusk gathered, he told his miserable story.

But not without many pauses of sullen silence, not without much questioning. "That old fellow was such a fool," he began, while his chest was heaving still with sobs ; "what business had he to put temptation in my way ?"

"What old fellow do you say ?"

"Why, old Cottenham—old Cottenham. I was his clerk. I've no patience with him. He took such a liking to me from—from the first, and he knew nothing about me—nothing at all."

"I can't help you unless you'll tell me what you have done."

“Done! I’ve done what you can never set right. I nearly got away—I got to Liverpool—I was all but off, and had paid for my passage.”

“You robbed him, then? Lancey, I can help you if you’ll only tell me all.”

“Yes, I robbed him then. I had paid for my passage, when I saw a face that I knew, a porter old Cottenham employed, looking at the passengers as they went on board. There were detectives with him. I edged myself back. In short I got ashore and hid myself.”

“But tell me what you had stolen.”

“I used to play high; sometimes I won—very often I won—and had such sums of money as you never fingered in your life. But there came a run of ill-luck, and I lost all—and got nearly three thousand pounds into debt. And that old ass—that old fool—when I was in despair about my debts he sent me to his bankers with a large sum of money. He had often sent

me with securities of different kinds, but not such as I could use ; but in this parcel were two cheques for large amounts, the rest all in notes and gold ; and I cashed the cheques, for it had flashed into my mind, as I went, that play was a misery and a bondage, and if I could get away *I could lead a more innocent life*, and yet not have to pay these debts at all."

Don John groaned.

"Before I had time to think, I had got home and packed up my clothes. I told mother, Cottenham had sent me on a journey for him, and I was off."

"But where's the money, then? You did not go. There's yet time, there's yet hope ; give it to me and let me pay it back. He might forgive you."

"There's no time, and there's no hope. I've lost it."

"How."

"I gave away—I had to give away—a large part of it, to some fellows who found

me out. Hush-money. Don't you understand ? ”

“ And the rest ? ”

“ I'm sorry ; it cuts me to the heart to know that the police are after me, and to dread that I shall be a disgrace to you. It's gone ; I thought I would risk what was left, to get perhaps all back, and repay it ; and I did. I risked, and lost. It's all gone ; I gambled it away. Oh, I wish I could die, but I can't. I found out next that I was followed, and I put on this disguise.”

“ There's one thing more that I want to know,” said Don John, “ and you must tell it me as carefully and as plainly as you can, for on it mainly depends my yet being able to help—”

“ You can't help, dear boy, as to setting me right with old Cottenham, so that I can show my face and not be taken up.”

“ I want to know about your changing

your name. Your mother said you had changed your name."

"Yes, I called myself John Ward. Cottingham only knew me as John Ward."

"Why did you do that?"

"I suppose because I foresaw—"

"Foresaw what? Are you going to sink yourself lower yet in this abyss of crime and disgrace by admitting that you did it with a view to making a future crime easier?"

"Your father is so sensitive," said Lancey, "he would feel any disgrace that came upon me, as if it was a reflection upon him, on my education that he gave me, on my home and my bringing up; and so—so I did it *in case*."

Don John noticed the unusual expression, "*your* father." Lancey had the grace to feel his position. For the first time in his life he spoke as if not claiming this father for himself.

"You'll act like a brother to me," he said, with a heavy, despairing sigh.

“Yes,” answered Don John, “if it can be done consistently with acting like a son towards him.

Lancey was surprised; he turned towards Don John, who was aware that in the dusk he was scanning him attentively.

“So far,” he repeated a little faintly; and when Don John made no answer he went on, “What I want you to do of course is to help me cross the water. I dare not leave off my disguise, but even as I am I can get to Liverpool begging and walking; and if I had money enough from you, I think I could get over.”

“That would do you no real good. You are not reformed, not repentant, not aware of your disgrace, and sin, and misery.”

“I am!”

“You wish you had got over to America with that money in your pocket.”

“I tell you I do repent. I am miserable, I am lost, and I know it.”

“I am going to help you, dear boy, as

well as I can, but I shall never call you Lancey again. The only chance of your not disgracing father and mother and me, is in what you did for a wicked purpose. You can be helped as John Ward—unless the police are too quick for us, and you are taken up on a charge of felony before I can see the man whom you wronged.”

“ Only help me over, that is the thing to do. What can you be thinking of? Going to see Cottenham would be bearding the lion in his den; it would be almost like betraying me. Surely you don’t hope to make him say that he’ll not prosecute, that he will forgive me. He liked me, I tell you; he trusted me though I was almost a stranger. He cannot forgive me, for he’ll have found out by this time.”

“ Well? ”

“ There were things of his in my desk,” whispered Lancey.

“ You’re sunk so low—so low, that I—”

“ I’m not sunk so low that I would do

you any harm,” exclaimed Lancey. “ You know very well that when mother told us two that base story at Ramsgate, and you were so dumbfounded that you couldn’t say a word, I told her to her face that it was all a lie, and, by Jove, I almost made her own as much.”

“ You have never *taken* any advantage, though you have had every possible advantage given you with regard to that story.”

“ I know.”

Thereupon followed the account of Captain Leslie’s bequests; and Lancey listening, found once more that there was hope for him, in spite of everything that he had done to throw himself away.

In a hurry and in a whisper, for Don John and he did not dare to risk being found together, the poor young criminal was told to keep himself in hiding only for a few days longer ; and as he did not dare to go to post-offices, and could not tell in what part of the country he might be, he

was to buy every day a certain penny paper agreed on between them, and there he should, in as short a time as possible, find an advertisement telling him what his foster-brother had been able to do. In any case he was always to be John Ward ; and even if he had the misfortune to be taken up by the police, in that name he was to abide his prosecution. And so his disgrace and punishment would cause no pang to those who had so loved him ; they would never know. And on this condition his foster-brother promised never to forsake him.

It was nine o'clock when Don John stole back along the hedge, leaving Lancey sitting under it alone. Don John perceived, as he turned the matter over in his mind, that it was the misery and disgrace of the situation, not the crime he had committed, that weighed on Lancey's heart.

Even if Don John's conscience could have suffered him to procure the money,

and help Lancey over to America to escape from justice, this would do no real good—he might be followed there, and the Johnstones might have to suffer. The crime of this still dear adopted son would be such a life-long distress and misfortune as almost to swallow up the sense of his disgrace.

All Don John's determination that Lancey should have none of Captain Leslie's money melted away. He must be set right, and the sum he had taken must be restored, as the only chance of saving him; and with this money it must be done, and no other.

Little more than twelve hours after this, in a small dusty office in the heart of the city, a young man sat writing, and opening his eyes from minute to minute so widely that he could not see the page. His pen spluttered—he sighed with excitement; it was no use trying to write, he put it down.

In a minute or two a remarkably sweet man's voice was heard outside, and the

speaker came in and took up a row of letters, all addressed "Locksley Cottenham, Esq."

"Now for it," thought the clerk.

"There's—there's somebody upstairs who wants to speak to you, sir."

"What did you show him into my room for?" said Locksley Cottenham, Esq., frowning.

It was not much of a frown; the face was as pleasant as the voice—a round chubby face, open and smiling; it did not look wrinkled, but it was surrounded by perfectly white hair, as soft as wool.

"Did he tell you his business?"

"It's not a man at all," answered the clerk, "it's a young lady."

The clerk felt a certain joy in communicating this astonishing piece of news. That it might lose none of its effect, he did it as abruptly as he could.

Locksley Cottenham, Esq., went slowly upstairs, his little den door was open, a

worn oilcloth was on the floor, a writing-table heaped with papers was in the middle, and there were two chairs, in one of which, sure enough, sat the young lady.

Oh ! what a pretty young lady ! His old heart warmed to her at once. What an air of shyness, and sweet blushing confusion ! What colour might the eyes be that were veiled by those downcast lashes ? She gave him time enough to think all this before ever she lifted them. It was Charlotte.

She looked at him, and half rose as if to acknowledge his presence ; then she cast her eyelids down again. It was a very little room. He stood in the doorway and said,—

“ I haven’t the pleasure of knowing your name ? ”

Then she spoke, with an air perfectly sweet and confiding ; it was not he, it was the circumstances that made her shy.

“ The friend who brought me said I was not to tell you any name.”

As she spoke she looked at him, and thought what a nice old gentleman he was. He was so very chubby ; his face might almost have been called a sweet face, it had so much of the child in it.

“ This parcel,” she continued, trying to untie a piece of pink tape, and not succeeding, for her hand trembled a little.

He had seated himself in the other chair, with the table between them.

“ Shall I undo it for you ? ”

“ Yes,” said Charlotte, “ and look at what it contains.” She perceived a certain gravity now in his manner. He did not seem altogether pleased with her ; but in a minute or two, while she watched him, so much depending on what he might think, she saw the chubby face take on an air of utter puzzlement and surprise.

“ A friend gave you these to show to me ? ” he inquired, lifting up some parchments.

“ Yes.”

“Do you know what they are?”

“Of course; they are the title-deeds of a Scotch estate.”

“The title-deeds of a Scotch estate, which seems to have been sold by the executors of the late Fraser Macdonald to Patrick Leslie. I never heard any of these names before. What has this to do with me?”

“The friend who sent them wants to pay you a sum of money which—no, I am not saying this aright—he is going to pay it as soon as possible. He prays you to keep these title-deeds as security till he can produce it, and in the meantime, if you could be merciful and kind.”

She looked at him and paused: she observed that he was startled, and that he hastily put down the deeds.

“It appears that certain things are understood here which are not expressed,” he remarked.

“Yes.”

“Your friend—I need not mention him by name—”

“You do not know his name.”

“Indeed! I thought it might be John Ward.”

“No, it is not.”

“That makes the matter no better—quite the reverse.”

“But I want to explain this to you, so far as I may.”

“If I understand you aright, you offer me money to stop certain proceedings.”

“That is not at all how my friend expressed it to me.”

“Perhaps not.” He began to tie up the parcel with its pink tape. “I am very sorry. I must return these deeds.”

“You will not consider this again? you will not be merciful?”

“You must take the deeds.”

He put them into her hand.

“Then you will see my friend. I am sure he can make you understand better

than I have done. We never counted on your refusing."

"I am very sorry for you, my dear young lady."

"But you will at least see my friend?"

"It is much better that I should not. I will send a message to him instead."

"Yes. You will advise him how to act, as this way does not please you. It will be a kind message, for you look so kind."

She looked at him appealingly, and when he made no answer, she went on in a faltering tone,—

"Then what am I to say to him?"

"You can ask him if he ever heard of such a thing as compounding a felony?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE dusty, smoky sunbeams were shooting down into Mr. Cottenham's room about three o'clock on a warm afternoon, when his clerk knocked at the door. He may have been dozing, for he seemed desirous to show himself more alert, and to speak a little more sharply, than usual; while some one was shown in, and the door shut behind him.

“Decidedly I must have been asleep—bad habit. Don't remember saying this young fellow was to be shown up—don't remember what he is come about,” thought Mr. Cottenham. “Can't recall it at all.” He looked at his guest—at Don John, in fact, remarked his very light hair and fair complexion, the frank, good-tempered

air, and was sure he had never seen him before. He said to himself.

“A gentlemanly-looking young fellow, and in no hurry to speak. I see that he knows I have been napping.”

The young man spoke at last, not without a slight air of deference, which was very agreeable.

“You sent a message to me.”

“A message?”

“By a young lady.”

The smiling, chubby face took on an air of concern and wonder.

“She was to ask me whether I had ever heard of such a thing as compounding of felony.”

“Yes.”

“I am an articled clerk to a lawyer. Criminal cases are not in his line, but I have access to the best law-books.”

“I consider that the young lady, innocently of course, and in ignorance—” interrupted Mr. Cottenham.

“Pardon me, I come only in reply to your message, to inform you according to the best authorities what is meant by compounding of felony.”

“Well, well, this is remarkable.”

Don John unfolded a sheet of foolscap paper, on which was some writing in the round hand of a copying clerk, and began,—

“‘Compounding of felony is the taking of a reward for forbearing to prosecute a felony; and one species of this offence (known in the books by the more ancient appellation of theft-base) is where a party robbed takes his goods again, or other amend, upon agreement not to prosecute.’”

“I thought as much!”

“It could not be more clear. Shall I go on? ‘This was formerly held to make a man an accessory to the theft, but is now punished only with fine and imprisonment.’”

“Only!” ejaculated the listener, “*only*

with fine and imprisonment. Now what could possess you, to read all this to me?"

"It defines the compounding of felony."

"It defines it very clearly! I am much afraid of the law. I have got into the clutches of the law three times."

"That could only have been innocently, as you said of the young lady, and through ignorance."

"You are sure of this? You don't require much time for making up your mind."

"I have had time enough already to feel grieved to think that when a certain thing is explained and arranged I shall probably never have the pleasure of seeing you again in this world. I shall be obliged to wish indeed that you may never know even my name."

The round, childlike face took on its sweetest expression.

"Explained and arranged! Well, well, the confidence of youth is amazing!"

“There’s a good deal more of it,” said Don John. “This perversion of justice in the old Gothic constitutions was liable to the most severe and infamous punishment. Indeed the Salic law ‘*la trovi eum similem habuit, qui furtum*’—”

“Stop! That I will not stand. What is such jargon to me?”

“I had better go on then to the English, ‘And by statute 24 and 25 Vict. c. 96, s. 102 (amended by 33 and 34 Vict. c. 65), even publicly to advertise a reward for the return of property stolen or lost, and in such advertisement to use words purporting that no questions will be asked; or purporting that a reward will be paid without seizing or making inquiry after the persons producing the same; or promising to return to a pawnbroker or other person any money he may have advanced upon, or paid for such property; or offering any other sum of money or reward for the return of the same: subjects the

advertiser, the printer, and the publisher to a forfeiture of fifty pounds each.' ”

“Is that all ?” There was the least little touch of sarcasm in the tone of this question.

“I could have multiplied authorities, I could have copied a great deal more, but I thought that was enough.”

“I think so too. Compounding of felony is now very clearly explained ; what I still fail to understand is the meaning of your conduct ! I am not expected to consider it disinterested, I suppose.”

“I had something to hope for, of course.”

“And I should like to know whether, when you searched through the law-books for these definitions, you instructed yourself as to what compounding of felony was, at the same time that you prepared to instruct me ? ”

Don John for the moment endeavoured to preserve a stolid expression, but as he

could not,—as he felt himself detected, he glanced furtively at the round, chubby face, and then looked again, and seemed to gather confidence and comfort.

“I want to dismiss that subject, now if you will let me, and mention to you a poor young man who has behaved very wickedly to you, and who is very miserable.”

“In short, John Ward. I trusted John Ward; I was very kind to him.”

“He told me so; it aggravates his crime. He robbed you of the sum of three thousand and fifteen pounds and fifteen shillings.”

“He told you that! you have seen him then.”

“Yes; he is very miserable. He says that he deeply repents—”

“I am sorry for him,—and for myself,—and for you.”

“By a quite unexpected circumstance, some property was left, on which both he and his mother thought that he had a

claim; at first his claim was disallowed, but now it is admitted."

"Indeed, indeed. Well, I don't know what to make of this."

"I have seen him a second time, and I am thankful to say that when I was explaining to him about this claim, he asked whether the money would amount to as much as three thousand and fifteen pounds and fifteen shillings. I was less miserable about him after I had heard him say that. It shows that he really does repent."

"You are his good friend."

"He humbly begs your forgiveness for what he has done, and he humbly desires to restore to you by me the whole of the money that he stole. Here it is." He handed over the table a parcel neatly sealed.

"Here it is," repeated Mr. Cottenham, as if this unexpected turn of affairs confused him to the point of leaving him devoid of any original words. He took up his eyeglass and leaned over the parcel without

touching it. Then he drew towards him the paper Don John had read, and carefully considered that. In the shrewdness with which he scrutinized it there was something childlike and simple; but in the silent pity with which he turned over the yet unopened parcel, there was something that childhood cannot attain.

At last he broke the seal, and slowly spread out the notes, and opened the little packet of gold.

Don John's heart danced.

"It was a large sum to lose," muttered Mr. Cottenham. "And his behaviour cut me to the heart too. I suppose," he went on, but not addressing Don John; "I suppose I cannot be bound to prosecute now?"

He appeared to fix his eyes on a map which was hanging on the opposite wall, and to address his remark to that. "I have been bitten by the law three times already."

Don John chose out an opposite map, and in his turn made some cautious re-

marks. “A fellow must be prosecuted on some particular charge, either he is accused of a crime against the prosecutor, or against ‘Our Sovereign Lady the Queen.’ Now if a man tried for murder could produce in court the supposed murdered man, and prove that he was alive and well—”

“The two might walk out of court, arm in arm, for ought the judge could say! There was no crime!”

“Or again, a man accused of a robbery, if he can produce a receipt in full, for the money in question, cannot be brought to trial, the intending prosecutor has no charge to bring against him. Only,” continued Don John, “if writs are out against such a man, and when he has paid he is arrested before he has the receipts to show, his people are liable to be disgraced; his story might get wind.”

Mr. Cottenham lost himself in cogitation here, then he said,—

“I shall give John Ward a receipt in

full, and write him a short letter by you. What can I say better than, 'Sin no more, lest a worse thing happen to thee'? You may trust me to do all I can for you."

He began to write, and having put a certain stamp at the end of the letter, handed it to Don John, who received it with eager joy and fervent thanks.

"This has been a great trouble to you, since you first heard of it."

"Yes."

"So it has to me. I felt that he had ruined himself, and I had trusted him."

"But I felt not only that he was ruined, but that his trial would disgrace my people. They know nothing of this, not one word."

"Well, if it depends on me, they never shall; for I think they never need. You have conducted this case very well for your first client. I suppose I am your first?"

"Oh, yes."

"Father and mother both living?"

"Yes, both, I thank God."

“As doubtless they do for you. It is a fine thing to have a son. I lost my son—he was my only one. I have still a daughter, about the age, as I think, of that beautiful young girl whom you sent to me. She is not your sister, of course.”

At this mention of Charlotte, a sudden change came over Don John's face in spite of himself. The denial had leaped out of his eyes before he answered, “That young lady is not my sister—no.”

“If she is in any sense under your charge, or influence, I cannot but express a hope that you may never have to send her on an errand again which has to begin by her informing the one person present that she must conceal her name—”

Don John looked up.

“I fervently hope that young lady may never be sent on such an errand again. Being what she is, and looking what she is, you could not have thought any evil of her, for a moment—any evil at all.”

“I did not.”

“And you being what you are, and looking what you are, she could think nothing but good of you. On what better errand (if you had understood it) could I have sent her to you, unless I had sent her to ask for your blessing?”

“Sir! no man was ever so acceptably reproved.”

“We are not strangers to you, we both know you by reputation.”

“Indeed! there is nothing else that I can do for you?”

“Unless you will shake hands with me.”

Thereupon they parted, and Don John with the precious receipt buttoned up in his coat, ran clattering downstairs, and sped towards the Great Northern Railway, getting out at a station agreed upon between the two, and walking about in search of the poor acrobat. He wandered through the suburban streets, and stared into the eating-houses, till he was getting

tired out; but he did not feel alarmed, for he knew Lancey might have taken fright, thinking himself watched.

At last he came home.

The next morning before breakfast, his mother with an ivory paper-knife was cutting open the newspapers, and laying them before his father's plate, when glancing one over, she remarked, "I often wonder what some of these queer advertisements mean. Here is one odder than usual: 'The acrobat may wash his face.' "

"I've been told they concern some smuggling operations; they are signals it is thought," said Marjorie, "signals to vessels that have smuggled goods on board."

"Perhaps the 'Acrobat' is the name of one of those vessels," observed Mary.

"Perhaps," answered the father carelessly, and with a smile.

Don John and Charlotte exchanged

glances: that was all which passed. The talk concerned Marjorie's wedding, which was to be in three days. The bridegroom was already in the house, the grandmother was expected in an hour. The wedding presents were frequently arriving, and all was pleasant bustle and cherished confusion. It was so nice to have so much to do. Nobody wanted to think about the parting, especially the bride's father.

But the acrobat made no sign, and one day, two days, and then the wedding-day passed over, and still he was not to be found. Don John wearied himself with researches under hedges all about Hornsey, and out beyond Barnet; he had large bills posted up over walls in waste places, on hoardings, and outside the railway stations. "It's all right. The acrobat may wash his face." A great many eyes became familiar with that strange announcement, but apparently not Lancey's, and yet Don John was moderately easy in his mind.

He felt sure Lancey had not been arrested. Mr. Cottenham would have taken care of that.

At the wedding everybody behaved very badly ; almost all wept, some because they were sorry, some because they were glad, and some because the others did.

The bridegroom stuck fast in returning thanks, when his bride's health was drunk. Her grandmother openly prompted him. The bride's father stuck fast in remarking how much he was blessed in his dear sons and daughters. People will say such things. This happy remark caused a good deal of piteous sniffing. The grandmother prompted him also, but not so audibly ; he was glad to avail himself of her words, and then she counselled him to sit down.

The day was hot, and there was an intermittent downfall of pouring rain. The bridesmaids' gowns, in spite of awnings, got wet at the bottom. The rain poured through openings in a tent which had been

pitched in the field, and splashed into the bountiful bowls of custard, and weakened the claret-cup, and cooled the gravy. In that tent, the inhabitants of "the houses" were being feasted. The rain was not held on the whole to be a disadvantage, because, as some of the guests remarked, it cooled the air, and made the victuals seem to go down more sweetly.

At last, in a heavier downfall than ever, and with more tears, both from gentle and simple, the bride drove away. The father shut himself up in his study; the mother and her little Mary went upstairs to console themselves together. All the guests took their leave; and Naomi and Mr. Brown, settling themselves comfortably in a corner of the drawing-room, sat hand in hand.

There was nobody left in the great dining-room but the grandmother, Don John, and Charlotte.

"I shall not come up to Naomi's wed-

ding," remarked the former, "if ye all mean to go on in this way. I'm quite ashamed of you! Charlotte too; what had you got to cry for, I should like to know?"

"It was so affecting," said Charlotte demurely, and trifling with the flowers of her bouquet.

"Affecting! Yes; your little nose is quite swelled with crying!" (Charlotte went and peeped at herself in a glass) "and your eyelashes are wet yet. I hope ye'll behave better when your own wedding-day comes."

"I shall never have one," said Charlotte, in the same demure fashion, and with a little smile, which seemed to betoken superior knowledge.

"What, do ye really mean to tell me that ye never intend to marry?"

"Oh, no!" said Charlotte, "I think I should like to be married. I always have a theory that I should." She laughed.

"If anybody that was nice would have me."

The grandmother sat bolt upright.

"What!" she exclaimed rather sharply.

"I shall not be married, because nobody wants to marry me," persisted Charlotte, not the least put out of countenance. "I never had a lover" (excepting once for a day or two, and then he changed his mind), "and they think I never shall have."

"*THEY*," repeated the grandmother, with infinite emphasis; "and who are *they*, I beg to know?"

"Oh," said Charlotte carelessly, "Don John and the girls."

The grandmother looked steadily at Don John, and he appeared confused.

"Don John said it, did he? said ye had no lover! I thought he knew better!"

Charlotte had not eaten much breakfast, and was dipping some ripe strawberries into the sugar, and eating them with bread. "But I forgot," she continued, "that we

mean to call him *laird* now. Marjorie made us promise not to forget. Laird, shut the door."

"He may hold it open a moment for me first," said the grandmother, rising, and slightly tossing her head—there were a good many feathers in the wedding-bonnet, and they wagged as she walked. She laughed when she reached the door, but before it was shut behind her she was heard to murmur,—

"No lover has she. Well, I thought ye knew better, I did indeed."

CHAPTER IX.

“SHE means Lancey,” exclaimed Charlotte, “and I do think”—Don John had come up to her by this time—“I do think, considering what friends we have always been, and considering how I have helped you about him, you ought not to let her suppose it.” She put her hand to her throat. “No, I am not going to cry again ; but two or three times grandmamma has hinted at this kind of thing to me, and remembering all the piteous truth, I feel as if her thinking of him as my lover was almost a disgrace to me, and that was why I was so anxious to tell her that I had no lover.”

“She did not mean Lancey,” said Don John.

Charlotte had finished her strawberries.

“She must have meant Lancey,” she answered, “for there’s nobody else.”

The grandmother had much exaggerated the traces of tears. Charlotte had never looked so lovely in her life. That may have been partly because she had never been so beautifully adorned before. The shimmering white silk set off her dark hair, and there was lace round her throat, from which it rose like a small alabaster column, and then the rosebuds in her bouquet, how they matched the hues of her mouth! and it softened, and the dimple came in her cheek.

“Look,” she exclaimed, pointing into the garden, and there was the grandmother marching about among the dripping flowers, with a certain air of determination, “she’s quite cross still.”

“Yes; but not with you. Do not be vexed. She did not mean Lancey.”

“Then whom could she mean?”

“A mere nobody; for as you have said (and I deserve it), ‘*there is nobody else.*’”

“Don John!”

“She meant ME.”

All the sweetest changes that Charlotte’s face was capable of came into it then. She pouted as one cogitating, and her long lashes drooped, then she blushed—it was that real old-fashioned maiden blush, which is rather rare now, and so exquisitely beautiful that when seen under such interesting circumstances it can never be forgotten.

She sat down on a sofa in the corner of the room, where she could not be seen from the garden, and quickly recovering herself, began, “Then go to her at once, of course, and say—”

“Yes; what may I say?”

“I ought not to have been told this at all,” said Charlotte, in a tone not quite free from reproof. “It is your affair to find out how to say—that she is mistaken.”

“But she is not mistaken.”

“No!”

Charlotte had got the corner of the sofa, and looked forth from it. Under such circumstances people cannot sit side by side; but Don John sat as near to her as he could.

“No?” she murmured again, almost in a whisper, and she lifted up her eyes, and looked into his, which denied and denied that there was any mistake, in a fashion more convincing than words.

Just for a moment she felt as if a kiss was impending. Don John did not kiss her. He thought that was owing to his own new-born modesty, deference, and devotion, and did not know that she had already made him remote from her lips. He wanted to take her hand, but she scarcely let him hold it for an instant. Even at that pass it flashed into his recollection how often in their childhood he had lent her his own pocket-handkerchief to

dry her fingers on, when they were inked. All was different now, and he must make the best of the change. It would seem so natural to go down on his knees—but would she laugh at him? On one knee—but would she laugh at him? He started up on his feet, and burst forth with his love, and his entreaty, that she would not remember his boyish impertinence, and before he knew what he was about, he was on one knee, and the door being suddenly flung open, his grandmother entered. She was heard to utter a short laugh, and she hastily withdrew.

Don John sprang to his feet. He and Charlotte looked at one another, and they both laughed also. Charlotte as overcome by a surprising and absurd incident, Don John as one who accused his fate.

He had been pleading with her for a rose-bud—only one, out of her bouquet—and Charlotte had been so taken by surprise, that she knew not what to do. But

she was mistress of the situation now, new as it was to her.

“Come and sit down here,” she entreated. “Let us be our old selves again, and tell me what this means.”

But he still wanted the rose-bud, that he might get her hand to kiss, and when she withdrew it, she looked at it as if it might be changed.

“All this is very amazing,” she began; and repeated, “Let us be our old selves again.”

“I cannot be my old self; I love you.” He looked down: her little feet in their white satin shoes peeped forth, and seemed to nestle on the carpet, he thought, like two young doves; but of course he had the sense not to say this, he knew she would laugh at him if he did.

“But I meant that I want you to explain what all this means. You always had a theory, you know, which—which I thought a very sensible one,” said Charlotte,

suddenly giving her sentence a fresh form.

Don John heaved up a great sigh. "Yes, I know I have chiefly my own insolence and folly to thank, if you cannot understand or believe me."

"At any rate there's no occasion to be so melancholy about it," said Charlotte; and then, overcome by the absurdity of this sudden change in her old comrade, she burst into a delightful little laugh, which was quite irresistible.

Don John could not possibly help seeing how ridiculous the thing was as regarded in the light of his whole former conduct, and the two young creatures laughed together, both at themselves, and at the irony of fate.

"I never would have believed it of you," exclaimed Charlotte, recovering herself.

"It's poetical justice done upon me."

"I suppose it is."

"I deserve it."

“I had not reached to the point of thinking so!”

“But what are you going to do with me?”

“Do with you!” exclaimed Charlotte, laughing again.

“Yes. You make me laugh, but it’s no laughing matter. If you only knew. Don’t you think you can say—something?”

“Something appreciative?” suggested Charlotte, when he paused. “Yes, laird; I can say that your property becomes you vastly in the giving of it away. I can say that this must certainly have been a pleasant day to you, for you have got uncle out of a pecuniary scrape, made Marjorie happy, and are going to do as much for Naomi. I did say the other morning that I thought you had grown better-looking. I now see the reason of it; your bosom was glowing with virtue and generosity; you pose before my mind’s eye as on your first return I saw

you—classically bundled up in your new plaid, and smoking your cigar like a sort of Scotch Apollo.”

“It was only right you should know I had parted with that two thousand pounds. You, and only you!”

Charlotte blushed; the hint was rather a strong one.

“I shall have something much more difficult to tell you soon.”

“Don John!”

“Well?”

“It’s not at all becoming to you to be tragical. You cannot have forgotten that in our charades you never would do the tragic parts; because, as you said, a fellow to act tragedy well ought to have a Roman nose.”

“But I am not acting now.”

“No; I never meant to insinuate anything of the sort. But look how the sun shines and glitters on the wet roses, don’t you think if you were to take a cigar and

go out, and think this over, you would come back in a different humour?"

"I am always thinking it over."

"Since how long?"

"Since I came home from Scotland the first time, and you met me—waiting for me at the green gate—don't you remember?"

"Remember! No. Why, that's months ago."

"You leaned on the green gate—and I saw you."

"I always lean on the green gate. It couldn't be that."

"I saw how beautiful you were, and how sweet—and—I loved you."

"All on a sudden?"

"Yes."

"But what for?"

"What for!!"

"It was not for anything in particular, then?"

"It was for everything in general. I

am always finding out more reasons for loving you. If you send me out to walk among the rose-trees I shall find them in the shadows at their roots, and in the rain-drops that they shake from their buds. All the reading in the book of my life is about you, and the world outside tells me of you. Things fair and young and good I must needs love, because they are like you; there is pity in me, and I find a pathos in what is unlovely and old, because it is unlike."

"Extraordinary!"

"Don't be unkind, Charlotte."

"Oh, no."

So many charms in one small face—such dimples and blushes, and shy dropping of black lashes, and such a whimsical pathos, and almost tenderness—when she was not laughing at him—were hardly ever seen before.

"Don't you think you could afford me one kiss, Charlotte?"

“Certainly not.”

“But you will think of all this—you are not displeased?”

“Displeased! I always used to think nothing was so interesting as—”

“As love—such love as this—as mine?”

“Yes; and so I think still. Nothing can be so interesting, *in the abstract!*”

“Well, you might at least let a fellow kiss your hand; I never heard of a lover yet who was not allowed to do that.”

“If it were any other ‘fellow’—but you! Don’t be so ridiculous.”

“It’s cruel of you to make game of me.”

“And yet I love you better than any excepting Aunt Estelle, and my uncle and mother. I liked you, I believe, better than any one at all till now.”

“Liked me best. Oh, do tell me what is the difference between that and loving?”

“People whom we like are those

who (we suppose) will never astonish us; people whom we are not obliged to explain things to, because they know; people whom we perfectly trust—they are partners, comrades, friends.”

“You *like* me less now?”

“Perhaps so, laird.”

“It is my belief that your poetic mind eschews with distaste the notion of prosperity; if a fellow has, as you think, all he wants in this world, he is less interesting to you.”

“That is not impossible.”

“And it is nothing to me. Not that I allude to Captain Leslie’s bequest. Between Lancey and the girls, I have despoiled myself already of most of the money, and I shall not have the land much longer.”

“What can you mean, Don John?”

“Why you knew that I had parted with enough money to set poor Lancey straight. You helped me to do it, my lady and queen.”

“But the land?”

“Ah! yes, the land; there’s the rub. You have always thought of me as rather a jolly fellow, haven’t you? Not a fellow that had ever known misfortune, or had anything weighing on his mind.”

The rose hue faded out of Charlotte’s face now, and by absence helped its new expression to a deeper emphasis.

“When you were ill,” she began, “I thought you had something on your mind. My heart ached for you. I felt that you must have some sorrow clouding your nights and days. Even when you were getting better, I often saw it come over like a dark cloud to veil out all the sunshine.”

“And you *liked* me then, better than any one, and understood—”

“No, I did not understand; for I could not help thinking, that in some way it had to do with Lancey, and your distress at his going wrong.”

“It had something to do with Lancey.”

“Lancey, and his place here, and their love for him, and yours, have been wonderful to me all my life; but at least he can have nothing to do with this strange thing, that I thought you said about Captain Leslie’s land. You cannot possibly want to give that to him?”

“Certainly not, and yet it has to do with him, that I cannot keep it for myself.”

“You make him more important than ever,” said Charlotte faltering, and obviously shrinking from she knew not what.

“But he became ten times more important after I got better, after I had seen you leaning on the green gate, and you had told me about his trying to make you like him, and of his mother’s entreaties. I thought indeed for a long time that you did care for him. Till in fact you went with me to offer old Cottenham the title-deeds as a pledge. Then I knew for the

first time that you did it for all our sakes rather than for his."

"Lancey is at least not going to have that estate."

"No; nor I either."

"Amazing! Oh, my uncle is no doubt in debt more than we had thought."

"No; nothing of the sort. Mother is going to tell you why."

"Your mother! Aunt Estelle. Why should she tell ME?"

"Because it might concern you."

Charlotte blushed and flushed, and the dimple went away into hiding. "Aunt Estelle," she repeated; "but how should she know?"

"How should my mother not know? Could she see me day by day, and never divine that I loved you? She always knows without being told what concerns the happiness of her children."

"And she *consented to*—"

"She *proposed to* tell you several things.

She said I ought not to ask you to be my wife till you knew them."

"Aunt Estelle?"

"Yes; whether you can ever love me, or whether you cannot, you will always love mother ten times more when she has told you."

"Wait a minute, let me think."

Don John had no objection. He leaned over the end of the sofa. He knew all the expressions of Charlotte's face—the beautiful pouting mouth, and shining tender eyes. How she pondered and wondered!

"There really is something?" she sighed at last.

"Yes, really."

"And I cannot catch the remotest glimpse of it." But the mother's knowledge, and the mother's apparent sanction, gave a strange, sweet surprise and reality to the thing.

True love it was evident had come near

her. She foresaw that there would soon be a response to it ; but she thought most of the mother, her aunt who had brought her up, and been so loving to her. It was manifest that nothing could be denied to her ; but how amazing that she should be brought into the story. "I cannot make it out," she exclaimed.

"No."

Then remembering how she had laughed at this mother's son, and teased him, and denied him the small comfort of a drooping rose-bud, she went on,—

"But Don John, if you will let me tell you beforehand exactly what it means, I think after all I had better give you that kiss."

"Oh, yes ! do tell me then what it is to mean."

"First, it is to be for the past, for a parting with all the old yesterdays. We used to be such friends, and I am glad we were."

“Tell me the rest, and give it me.”

“I knew so little of my mother. I always loved yours best of all. There was something more, but I forget it.”

“But give me the kiss.”

“Yes.”

CHAPTER X.

AFTER all, when we read the parable of the Prodigal Son, we find him for all his faults more interesting than that blameless brother who was at work in his father's field.

It was now twelve days after the wedding. In a small bare room, on a truckle bed, a poor disfigured patient was lying. A medical man without touching, leaned towards him, and regarded him with attention. He gave directions to two women, one of whom was seated on either side of the bed, then said, before retiring, "He'll do now. You'll do very well now, my poor fellow. Do you hear me?"

The patient assented, but scarcely in

articulate words, and presently dozed again.

After he had taken some food, and had his pillows altered to his mind, he began to look about him with interest and attention, specially to look at the face of his elder nurse, a simple and rather foolish face, but full of goodwill.

"I should like to see myself in a glass," he presently said.

"There aint a glass in the house, my pore young man," she answered. "It's an empty house that you was brought into."

"What is it that has been the matter with me?" he next asked.

"Well, it's what they call an eruptive fever," said the younger woman.

"Is it infectious?"

"Yes, it is; but it's my business to nurse such cases."

"I thank you for your goodness to me."

"You should thank God, my pore boy,"

said the other, "that He has made some of us with a liking for such a business."

"That's my aunt, Miss Jenny Clarboy," said the younger; "I had to have somebody here to cook, and wait, and help; so she came."

"For the love of God," explained Miss Jenny.

The patient sighed distressfully. "Then I am not to have a glass; but if I tell you that I hope my face *is* very much changed, you'll let me know whether it is, or not, won't you?"

"My poor young man, we don't ask you why you should want it to be changed; but I may say, that though you'll be like yourself again some day, your own mother wouldn't know you now, though she should look at you hard."

"I'm thankful," said the patient faintly; but whether for his present disfigurement, or for the promise of recovery, did not appear.

The younger nurse now retired to take some rest. The patient for awhile was very still. He looked about, but there was little in the room for his eyes to rest on. The clean ceiling and the sloping walls, were whitewashed and bare. A small green blind was hung before the curtainless window. There was nothing to look at but his nurse, and he contemplated her till the circumstance attracted her attention, and the simple creature was a little put out of countenance: for she had a clean, but exceedingly shabby, old print gown on, which was patched in various places. She actually began to explain.

“It’s a one as I’ve kept for cleaning, and washing days. I’ve respectable things for going to my chapel in.”

“Anything is good enough for me, Miss Jenny,” said the patient gently. “Won’t you draw the other chair nearer, and put your feet on the spoke to rest them?”

“I will, my pore young man. Now you

can talk so as to be understood, I warrant there's not much of the tramp on your tongue."

"I was only a tramp, because I've thrown myself away."

"That's a sad hearing."

"I heard you pray by my bed, when you thought I should die."

"There was little else to be done for you."

"And you said I was a poor lost creature."

"We're all lost till Christ finds us—Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world."

"Till Christ finds us—yes—but I have tried hard to prevent Him from finding me. I have tried to hide myself from Him under the darkness of a great many evil deeds."

"You talk very faint and very hollow. I may not let you go on, and I'll only say this, my pore lad, that if nobody else will have anything to say to you, and you are so lost that you have nothing but misery

to call your own, why then lie still and wish (for you're too weak to pray), wish that He may find you, and He will, for you are the right sort for Him."

There were many days of pain and sickness after this; there were many drawbacks, and sometimes it almost seemed as if the poor young patient would sink.

"Who's going to pay for all this?" he one day asked.

"You've no call to think of that," answered the younger nurse, "for there's nothing asked for from you, John Ward."

John Ward sighed; how could he tell that he ever should be able to repay this money. During the first stages of his illness, which had come on suddenly, he had been delirious; he was lying under a hedge wet with dew, and ghastly with smeared paint and whitewash, when a policeman found him. He had some recollection of this, and that he had been able repeatedly to make known his wish that a penny paper

might be bought for him. Of course no notice was taken of this request; but his intervals of sense for several days were spent in repeating it; and even after he became so weak and confused that he by no means knew himself what he had wanted it for, he could often be soothed by having some old piece of newspaper put into his hand, when he would fumble over it, and guard it jealously. Thus his desire for a newspaper was always regarded by these women as a proof of delirium, and one of his worst symptoms.

Of course, though they did what was right by him and never left him, his sick bed was not surrounded by those delicate, attentive cares that he would have had if he had been in the midst of a loving, cultured family. Nobody tried to find out a meaning in his fancies, or made experiments to discover whether this one or that would please him. So when he was a little better and again approached the

subject of the papers, he was cut short by the remark that the doctor would by no means let them go to the book-stalls fresh from the sick-room ; for the doctor was a very conscientious gentleman, and particular to prevent the spread of infection.

“ As you may *judge*,” Miss Jenny would say, “ when you see saucers here and saucers there full of *Condy's Fluid* that costs a pretty penny ; and that he doesn't grudge you, my pore young man, more than if it was water.”

Miss Jenny finding herself for the very first time in her life in a position of authority, took advantage of it, and seemed to rise to it strangely. She gave John Ward a good deal of advice, and he listened to it, wide as it was of the mark, with wonder and interest. It was advice suited to an acrobat and a tramp. Such she thought him. That this should be possible was a thing so piteous as to give it often a keener edge than any satire ; but then

she would go on in her simplest fashion to teach some of the most comforting doctrines of our faith. John Ward had heard these all his life, and yet they seemed new now. It is only those who have known what it is to be lost who can truly long to be found. He listened, and was comforted. The Saviour does not often walk in high places. John Ward, who knew himself to be a disgrace, and felt that he was wretched, had been cast out as the unclean thing, and lying in the dust had met with Him.

He was sitting up in bed for the first time when his nurse thus let him know that he had been dependent on charity. His head had been shaved again during his illness.

“And those wretched callicoes and that sash and wig of yours were burnt because of infection,” she continued; “but see what good friends have been raised up for you, they are going to make a gathering for you at our chapel to get you some

decent second-hand clothes and a pair of shoes so soon as you are strong enough to wear them.

“Her brother,” said Miss Jenny, indicating her niece, “is a waiter, and waits in the best of families, so you’ll *jedge* that he has to wear good clothes in his calling. That white shirt you have on is an old one of his.”

“Yes,” said the niece; “he gave it to me for you, being fine and fitter for a sick patient than the coarse things they sell in the slop-shops. And he says he’ll give you a waistcoat when you go out, one that he has done with.”

John Ward cast his eyes on the frayed wristband of his shirt. If ever in his life he had felt shame for himself it was then. “I am very much obliged to your brother that is a waiter,” he said, with the peculiar gentleness of intonation that he always used towards his nurses.

Miss Jenny was about to depart home.

The patient could now be very well attended to by one person. She talked of her sister, who was a respectable dress-maker, and always paid her way, and then of the Johnstones. Not, of course, as the poor speak of the rich to the rich—but as they speak to one another—"My sister, 'Mrs. Clarboy,' and 'Johnstone's people,' that live at the great house."

What a pang it gave poor John Ward to hear these familiar names, and feel himself remote!

"Well, good-bye, aunt," said the niece, "you're not to shake hands with the patient now you're dressed, nor go nigh him."

"I'm truly obliged to her," said John Ward.

"How respectable and how well you look in that Sunday gown," continued the niece. "And nobody knows what a deal of use you've been to me."

"Kept up your spirits, did I, dear?" answered Miss Jenny complacently.

“No, I don’t say that,” replied the niece; “I never feel my spirits half so good as when I’ve got a right down bad case, that anybody else might be afraid to come near; nor so well in my health neither.”

“It’s a providence,” replied Miss Jenny; “and as for my pore nerves, I don’t know where they’re gone to, since here I came.”

So then she nodded to John Ward, and was gone. He might not send any message by her: shame and probable danger to himself prevented that. He laid himself down again and cried feebly. Then his nurse gave him food.

“Don’t you take on,” she said, “it’s bad for you.”

“But I don’t seem to get well,” said the poor fellow.

“Get well,” she repeated with the merciless directness always used by the poor to those of their own class, “there’s a deal to be done before you get well.”

“What’s to be done?”

“Why, for one thing, there’s your skin to come off—when you see it coming off your hands and face in bits as big as sixpences you’ll know you’re getting well.”

John Ward inquired whether the process would hurt him much.

“Not a bit,” she replied; “but I may tell you for your own comfort that the parish authorities are very particular in this union; they’ll keep you here, and let you have the best of food till that’s over. In short, they won’t let you go—or every lodging-house you went and slept in you’d spread the infection, and that would soon raise the rates.”

John Ward perceived that he was a pauper, and felt it. Also he felt that charity, at least national charity, was largely indebted to enlightened self-interest.

“As cold as charity” has become a proverb; he was guarded here, and lodged and fed, as he was informed, because by coming out he might raise the rates.

“And how thankful that ought to make you,” she continued; “all your meals coming up as regular as can be, and there’s a gathering to be made, to buy you clothes, and you’ve time to think upon your ways.”

John Ward was not at all thankful to the parish authorities; but he did much relish his meals, simple as they were, and for many an hour he did lie still and think upon his ways.

With a certain humbleness and simplicity he tried to pray. The chapters in the Bible that his nurse read to him appeared fresh and interesting; the words were familiar, but they meant something new, and her homely comments, which seemed to take for granted that he had broken almost all the commandments of the Decalogue, did not rouse in him any resentment. It was all true, truer than she thought; the wonder was that even now, even yet, there might be found a remedy.

And so the hours and days went on, till at last, a poor, hollow-eyed young man, he went forth from the cottage where he had been nursed, with a benefaction of two shillings in his pocket, and an ample meal of meat and bread tied up in a pocket-handkerchief, for the gathering at Little Bethel had provided even this last article.

He had a loud, hollow cough, and with faded eyes he surveyed his grotesque habiliments—one of the waiter's old coats, very white at the seams, a shirt and hat contributed by the preacher, and trousers a world too wide for him; also a pair of new boots, of strong workmanship, and heavy with hob-nails. He must spend the half of his money in sending a telegram, and before he reached the station he saw, torn and faded, and not perfect in any case, the token he longed for. On hoardings and walls, and on empty houses, glaring and disreputable portions

of it greeted him everywhere. His heart leaped with joy once more, and echoed the words,—

“It’s all right; the acrobat may wash his face.”

He doubted awhile in sheer delight, and spelt over the disjointed sentence; but at last he found a perfect copy, and creeping into the railway-station, sent his telegram, and rested on a bench to await the event.

His troubles now were soon over. In less than an hour Don John appeared. Lancey was very quiet, very humble; he could say little more than that he had been extremely ill, and he was thankful to be taken in hand, decent lodging found for him, and proper clothes bought for him; then, weak as he was, shaken by his cough, and ashamed of the pauper position that he had just emerged from, he asked to know nothing but that he was safe from prosecution, and laid him-

self on his bed, leaving Don John to do and say what he pleased.

So he was left to rest and food, and his own salutary and bitter reflections. He did not betray much emotion the next day, when his foster-brother gave him old Cottenham's letter; but he wept when he was told how anxious the Johnstones had been at his disappearance. They often said it was certain he had gone to America, but no suspicion of his crime had ever crossed their minds. They hoped he would write soon to them. So far so good; his crime had been condoned, and had caused them neither misery nor disgrace, and of his sufferings they had not known. But what next? Could it be right, or would it be possible to bring him under their roof again? Fortunately the deciding of this was not left to Don John.

Lancey had no sooner found himself alone, than he had written a letter to "his mamma," setting forth that he had been

extremely ill, and giving her his address with directions to come to him. He directed the letter to her old lodgings in which he had left her. He knew nothing of her visit to Scotland, or her wish to follow him to America.

Fortunately for her, Don John's advice, that she should wait in England for tidings from Lancey, had taken some effect on her mind.

She felt that if he did not want her, he would take care she did not find him, whether she followed him or not; but if he did want her he would certainly write to her at the only address he knew. So, after waiting awhile in the north, she came back as cheaply as she could, took a garret in that same house, and waited and hoped.

At last a letter came; and he was close at hand.

She hastened to him, bringing with her the few clothes he had not taken with him.

when he went on his nefarious errand. She was much shocked at his appearance and his cough, but there was little for them to talk about. He merely told her that he had had a dreadful illness, which he had entirely brought upon himself. She saw that he was humbled, and that all the spirit seemed to have gone out of him; but he said little more, and never complained.

"I wish you had another suit," she said, holding up a dress-coat, "for that one you have on seems rather heavy for you this weather."

"I have another," he answered, "a whole suit, I left in the box in our old play-room at 'the house.'"

"Then ask Mr. Don John to send it you."

"Perhaps I shall some day; he has enough trouble with me just now."

"And how did it come there?"

Lancey seemed confused, and did not

tell her how, in the middle of a summer night, tramping down from Liverpool, he had reached that once-beloved home, and wandered about in the garden; then, knowing it, and where everything was kept so well, had got the longest fruit-ladder and put it against the play-room window, which was open, and there, the better to hide himself, had put on the wretched clothes and the wig, in which he had been found, and had folded up his own clothes and put them into the box. The rubbish in which they had been used to array themselves when they acted their charades! He put on the worst of it. There was bread in the room; Mary had been having her supper; he took the loaf, went cautiously down the ladder, and replaced it, then filled his pockets with fruit, and went his way.

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN Mrs. Ward heard that Lancey still had property at "the house," she was at once tempted to make that an excuse for going there, claiming it, and giving her own view of matters to Mrs. Johnstone.

Mr. Johnstone and Don John would be away; it seemed such a good opportunity for wringing the other woman's heart, by describing Lancey's cough—talking of his sufferings, how he had been picked up under a hedge, and how, if he had died, he would have had a pauper's funeral.

Lancey was generally kind to her, he was even glad of her company; but when she told him of this project, he was ex-

ceedingly angry, and desired that she would do nothing of the kind.

“You were always promised a share of everything,” she grumbled, “and it is my belief that they are forgetting all that, and you too.”

“If they can forget my past, the better for their own peace,” sighed Lancey, “and as to my share, I have had it already. I was never promised a certain sum. I was only promised a certain proportion of the family possessions.”

“And you have had nothing yet,” she answered, “but just your bringing up.”

“Yes, I have. I have had three thousand pounds from Don John.”

“Mercy!” exclaimed Mrs. Ward. “I thought—yes, I’ll allow that I thought—it was bluster and vapouring, when he said that on your account he should keep his hands from touching Captain Leslie’s fortune. Three thousand pounds! Wherever is it, then? You told me we were living

on money Mr. Don John sent to you—living as I thought from hand to mouth; but if it's on the interest of three thousand pounds, I call that handsome, and I don't feel that it's at all the same thing."

She laid down her work and pondered.

"Three thousand pounds!" Lancey having justified Don John, felt too weak to enter on his own terrible story, and he let her alone. Many bitter and salutary thoughts had possession of his breast; and when she added, "And yet it might be—I mean it may be—that you've a right to all—"

"You don't think so, you are sure of the contrary," Lancey burst out roughly.

"Yes, my blessed boy, that I am."

"And yet you're not at all thankful for this three thousand pounds, this great sum of money, which has saved me from a trial for felony—from becoming a wretched convict."

"Don't talk so wild," she answered

soothingly. "You are as weak as can be still. It's too much for you."

"God forgive you, and me too," muttered Lancey, fretted almost beyond endurance by the knowledge that he had not strength to tell her all.

"It is you who talk wildly, mamma," he began. "It makes me sick to hear such nonsense. We cannot both have a claim to all."

"No, I allow that," she answered, as if it was a great concession.

"Well it's their own doing that has made me talk and think wild about it." She presently added, "They treated you both exactly alike."

"But they loved me the most," said poor Lancey, with something like a faltering in his voice. "I always felt and knew that though they were just, I was the favourite; nothing could have been done more for me."

"And then you had me to be fond of

you as well," said Mrs. Ward, "as soon as I'd set my eyes upon you in the field, a pretty little fellow, jumping and shouting, I loved you so as nothing could be like it."

Lancey did not appear to notice the appealing tone in which this was said, he went on,—

"It is only of late years, since I have gone on so that they could not have me with them, that I have felt I was becoming less and less to them all, and Don John more and more."

"But you had me," she repeated.

"Yes," he answered, with unconscious indifference; and when he saw presently that tears were dropping on her hand, so that she could not see her work, he said fretfully,—

"Oh, mamma, don't."

"I often think you don't care for me a bit," she replied, with the short, sobbing sigh of a sick heart.

"I feel so weak," said poor Lancey, trying to put off a discussion. "Isn't it time I had my stuff?"

She got up and poured him out his tonic, and as she handed it him she went on,—

"You've often made me feel, in particular of late, that you're only willing I should live with you because it's a conveniency to yourself."

"Don't cry, mamma," said Lancey, a little touched.

"I'd rather by half that you'd reproach me and tell me it's all my own fault (if you'd be like a son to me at other times) than treat me so cold as you do."

"You'll not love me so well when you know all," Lancey began, but he stopped short, for his conscience, and even his heart, told him that this would make no difference.

She hardly heeded; taking his self-accusation merely for an acknowledgment of

gaming debts, and delinquencies yet more to be deplored but not punishable by any human law.

“Besides,” he went on, much more gently, “what would be the good of reproaching you with its being your own fault? Why that is what makes you feel it so keenly and be so bitter about it. Mother was not bitter; I am sure she did not feel it half so much. You have had the worst of it every way. But anyhow I am not the fellow that has any right to find fault. I could not have had more if I had been their own son, and if I had not been yours you could hardly have had less.”

“It’s true. I have had the worst of it.”

“And I am often sorry for you.”

Still the remonstrance though said gently, was not to her mind. She went on, having checked her tears,—

“But as you never doubt I’m your

mother, no more than I do, I wonder you don't love me more."

"I like you. Well, I love you as well as I can," said Lancey fretfully.

"I'm often afraid that when you get better you'll be off again, and leave your poor mother. It will break my heart as sure as can be if you do."

"I promise you that I never will."

"They'll invite you to stay at the house for change of air—I know they will—and then you'll forget me again."

"I do not think Don John will ever let me go there again."

"What! set himself up against you!—and pretend to order you?"

"And if he does allow it, I am not sure that I shall think I ought to go."

"You speak quite solemn, my Lancey!" she exclaimed, looking at him with alarm.

"But you'll stand by me, I have no doubt," continued Lancey; "and I begin to think, mamma, that I have behaved

badly to you. I'm pleased (now I consider it), to know that it's natural you should be fond of me. I don't mind kissing you—"

Remarkable speech, but quite to her mind; he raised himself up, and turned his hollow cheek to her.

He had always greatly objected to her bestowing on him this form of caress. There he drew the line.

Mrs. Ward rose, and carefully drying her face with her handkerchief availed herself of the present gracious proposal. She kissed him; and he kissed her, almost for the first time, and then, exhausted, laid himself down to rest, and to consider.

He had hitherto so much despised her; she had proved herself to be a mean and sordid person, without principle, and indeed without common honesty; still she was a great deal better than himself, as he now discovered.

When he was a little better he asked

her to read him a chapter in the Bible. It was characteristic of Lancey, now that he felt himself to be much changed, that he should think of this Bible-reading as likely to improve her; for his own part he was improved.

She took the book, but she turned white even to the lips. "You don't think you're going to die, my only dear."

"Oh, no!"

"This seems like it though."

"We were always brought up to think a great deal of the Bible," said Lancey, "they were always teaching us things in it."

"But you told me you hated those puritanic ways."

"I did then; but now those things comfort me, and seem to do me good."

"Oh, well, if it's only that, my Lancey, and if you're sure you are not going to die." Thereupon she found the place he mentioned and read to him for some time.

“And what did you think of it,” asked Lancey, not without a certain gentleness, as she closed the book. He had chosen chapters that he thought might be useful to her.

“I was so taken up with thinking of your poor father, I could not attend to the reading much.”

“Oh, what about my father?”

“When he was on his death-bed he asked me to read to him just as you did; I was that terrified that I ran down to the lodger below us. ‘Mercy, Mrs. Aird,’ said she, ‘what now? how white you look!’ so I told her. She was a play-actress of the lower sort, and not a good-living woman; in short, Lancey didn’t like my having anything to say to her. ‘I cannot do it,’ said I, ‘it frightens me so.’ ‘Nonsense,’ said she, ‘I’ll go and read to him as soon as look at him; he will die none the sooner for it.’ Well, if that woman didn’t go up as bold as brass and read to him, as if she’d been a saint. He died the day after.”

"It was of decline, was it not?"

"Yes, my Lancey."

"Did his cough sound like mine?"

"Don't say such heart-breaking things to me; you'll be all right soon."

"But did it?"

"Well, it did."

"There now, you need not cry. As the 'play-actress' said, *I shall die none the sooner* for knowing this."

"What with you making me read the Bible to you, and then talking about your poor father, you've quite overcome me," she exclaimed, starting up, and she went into her little bed-room to recover herself, for Lancey hated a scene.

And almost as she went out, the other mother came in, and Don John behind her.

She came in calm, tender, observant, and sat down beside his couch, taking him in her arms, and holding his head with her hand for a minute upon her bosom.

“Mother,” said Lancey, “I am not worthy that you should come to me.”

She did not contradict him, but releasing one hand, wiped away her quiet tears.

“I have never been worthy of you—never,” continued Lancey. “And all my faults and my sins against you and father seem much worse now that I feel how I have sinned against God.” She arranged his pillows again and let him lie down on them.

Don John had been looking out of the window, he now came forward to say, “Father and mother know nothing about your last three months—excepting that you have been very ill.”

“And that you wished to go to America without taking leave of us,” put in the mother. Oh, what a small delinquency for her to know of!

“I am afraid, indeed I feel sure, that if we did know how you have been conducting yourself, we should be much hurt, perhaps displeased—but Don John (and we

have trusted him in this)—Don John thinks it best we never should know.”

Lancey and Don John looked at one another, the old bond was just as strong as ever that bound them, but it had never been one that seemed to admit of any deep sense of obligation. They were both lucky fellows if the one could get the other out of a scrape, and save the parents from disgrace and pain.

“I am afraid it will be a long time before you are well enough to go back to your situation,” she said tenderly.

“Yes, mother,” was all he answered.

“Will Mr. Cottenham wait all that time?” she next asked. So far as she knew, Mr. Cottenham was not aware of Lancey’s intention of going to America, and this had been prevented by illness.

Lancey could not answer.

“Mother,” said Don John, “I have seen Mr. Cottenham twice. Lancey has lost the situation.”

“ Oh, but I hope he was kind ? ”

“ He was kind.”

And then she began to talk to him. A deep sense of the presence, nearness, and love of God had gradually grown up in her heart. Sorrow had been the earthly cause of this. She had dwelt long in the presence of a great doubt. It had first become sweet to her to feel that God knew which of these was her own son, and then opening her heart so fully to both of them, she had begun to think of them as both God's sons, and to perceive that He was giving the one who was not hers very unusual blessings, care, guardianship from evil, love, prayer, teaching, warnings. It was true that one of the two had persistently turned away and done evil, but she believed firmly, that the same God who had turned sorrow of hers into blessings for him, would certainly go on with him. The last stroke of bitterness had been dealt to her when the other mother, angry

at some lordly airs of Don John's, when he was indignant at a base thing which Lancey had done, had dared to tell both the young men their story ; and her own, as she had long known him to be—had come home, and fallen ill, and almost broken his heart.

But how much more truly he had been her own, and his father's, ever since. How much more fully than ever before she had now become able to sympathize in her husband's religious life, and receive and partake of those consolations that he offered to his son. She deeply loved Lancey still : we do love those whom we have been so good to. She talked to him, and Lancey answered her humbly, and with what seemed very true penitence ; but that he had been so lately hunted by the police, in hiding among the lowest of the low, and within an hour of being taken up to be tried for felony, she never dreamed..

When she rose to go away—"I suppose you send your love to your father, and all of them," she said. Lancey darted a look at Don John, which said as plainly as possible, "May I?"

She saw this, and saw the nod of assent given. Then Lancey said, "Yes, mother." She had just been going to add, "And of course as soon as you are fit to be moved, you will come and stay with us till you are well again." But the sight of this permission, asked and given, arrested her. She put her gloves on, considering all the time, then took leave of him, and went her way.

Don John soon observed that his mother was displeased. He knew she had noticed that Lancey all through the interview had seemed to look to him for guidance, and had got it. Don John was not penitent of course, but he knew that he had got into a scrape.

His mother presently said, "I meant to

ask poor Lancey whether he could come down to us to-morrow, but I did not care to hear you answer for him, and tell him whether he could or not."

Don John pondered. He and Lancey had already discussed this very question. Miss Jenny had never been inside "the house" in her life, and he could easily keep out of the fields. Besides, though looking wretchedly ill and thin, he was like his old self, not like the poor disfigured creature whom she had helped to nurse. When first they both talked of this, and Lancey pointed out that Miss Jenny would not recognize him, he was surprised to observe that, as to his going again to the house, Don John made still the same demur.

"I am not a felon!" Lancey exclaimed, rather bitterly; "that you should look as if you thought my presence would be a disgrace."

"No; because it takes two parties to make a felon—the criminal and the law.

You have done your part, the whole of it, it is the law that has not, and therefore you are not a felon."

Lancey quailed a little. He had not been arrested, he had not been in the dock, his name and antecedents had not been published in the newspapers, his adoptive family had not been put to shame. He seemed to himself to be indeed a sinner, and in need of God's forgiveness, but to be, somehow, nothing like such a sinner as if the law had found him out, and had taken its course.

"I do not wish to excuse myself," he began, "and I owe it to you that I can hold up my head among my fellow-creatures; but if I am not to hold up my head, how am I the better?"

And now Mrs. Johnstone was hurt, displeased in fact. She knew nothing of the facts of the crime, of the hiding, of the giving up on Don John's part of the three thousand pounds.

“His coming to us, poor fellow, is of course a matter for your father to decide, not for you,” she remarked. “It was indeed very wrong of him to break away from us, as he has done. I cannot quite understand why he should have wished to go to America, having a good situation, and so kind a person to work under as Mr. Cottenham ; but it is not for you to judge him, my dear, and if your father is inclined to forgive and have him home for a time, you will of course acquiesce, and I hope I shall never see such evidence of his being subservient to your wishes as I have seen to-day. I know you are allowing him what he lives upon, but—”

“But that’s a mere trifle,” Don John put in here, for the attack was unexpected and he did not know how to meet it.

“That you should be in the least hard or unjust towards him I cannot bear to think.”

No answer.

“Still less that such a feeling as jealousy should—no, I do not think it, and the more because you have no reason.”

Still no answer.

“It is a long time now since that lamentable affair—”

Don John’s face appeared to ask a question.

“Of the ring,” she continued; “and since that he has been I fear little better than the poor prodigal; but, my very dear son, though your father has lost so much that it would sound unreal if he were to say what that father said, yet so far as love, approval, trust and pride go, we may truly say each of us, ‘*All that I have is thine.*’”

Don John’s face was almost a blank. She knew all its expressions. He did not intend her to find out what he thought.

“But I must not be hard upon you, my dear,” she went on; “youth is naturally severe.”

To this general proposition Don John

expressed neither assent nor dissent; but he presently said, in a somewhat constrained fashion,—

“I have never been jealous of poor Lancey—never.”

Just then the train ran into their station; some of the home party were in it and they all walked through the fields together; but in a few minutes Don John turned back, and sent a telegram to Lancey,—

“If you are invited to come here, pray make no objection; accept at once.”

Don John was already in the midst of trouble about money. It had been difficult to get the three thousand pounds for Lancey without his father's knowledge, he now wanted seven hundred more; for to debts to that amount Lancey now confessed; and he was daily liable to be arrested. These creditors had to be called upon and appeased, some were paid, some had advances made them on account. A farm, in order to meet these demands, had

been already mortgaged. Don John did not feel even yet that he could trust to the truth of Lancey's repentance. He feared that if he came again to "the house," other creditors might appear, and claimants of no very creditable kind might dun him under Mrs. Johnstone's eyes. He had expressed this fear, Lancey had earnestly declared that he had no other debts than those he had named. Don John hoped this was true, but he must now take the risk of its being false, and if it was they would all have to abide the consequences.

CHAPTER XII.

“I THINK after all,” Charlotte had said, “I had better give you that kiss.” So she gave it. It was a sister’s kiss, and he knew it.

And she was so kind, so true, so helpful to Don John. They were comrades, friends and conspirators again. They had a sad and damaging secret in their sole keeping, and held the family honour in their own hands. And Naomi’s affair went on prosperously; and Mr. Johnstone in a great degree recovered his health, so that constant companionship was not needful for him; but Mrs. Johnstone had not yet talked to Charlotte, and Charlotte held Don John remote.

Charlotte was so beautiful ! But a young man's love not uncommonly is beautiful. It is a way she has.

Lancey had his invitation, and accepted it. He was very weak still, had still a hollow cough, and used to lie on the sofa in the drawing-room, or in the old play-room, and he too perceived that Charlotte was beautiful, and he liked to be in the same room with her, and observe her sayings and doings.

The same Charlotte, talking about things that so many people cared for not one straw, and bestowing on them the most impassioned feeling and sincere interest.

And once when "mother" entered the room, he saw her come to a pause, and regard them all, and especially regard him, with a certain attention. Why ? And then she quietly went out of the room, again looking as if lost in thought.

It must be something they had been saying, and yet how could it be ?

The girls had been laughing at Don John because they said he was such a complete John Bull, and he had justified himself, had even confessed to a conscious wish to keep up the old style and form of patriotism. He would like, if he could, still to believe that one Englishman could beat three Frenchmen. "As to slavery," he went on, "I hate to hear the old English horror of it made game of. 'Down with it at once, sir,' as nurse said to Fred the other morning when she brought him the black dose, 'for the longer you look at it the worse it is.'"

Fred, a great fellow of eighteen, made a sulky rejoinder: "How came Don John to know anything about his physic?"

No, it could not be their talk which the mother had noticed. In about a quarter of an hour she came in again, and sat down in her own corner on the sofa, taking up her knitting.

She still appeared to notice them all,

and Lancey felt that he must not look at Charlotte so much.

Charlotte and Don John were talking and arguing playfully, as of old, only that Don John treated her remarks with more deference. There was nothing to interest Lancey in the conversation, but he listened idly, because the mother did.

“Poetry! What! poetry, our finest English endowment! poetry destined to become a lost art! Surely, Charlotte, you cannot think that?”

“Not destined to decline at once, but in the course of years. The first move has been made already. We have begun to admire the wrong thing.”

“Other arts have been lost certainly.”

“And why? Partly, I think, because we try so many experiments; it is not enough to have perfection. What could be more beautiful than an old seventy-gun ship, or a wooden full-rigged merchant ship, or a sloop?”

“But we do not want our ships only for their beauty.”

“No; and yet we came nearer to the Creator’s work when we made our finest sailing ships than man ever came before.”

“Nearer than when he built the Parthenon?”

“Oh, yes; there is almost the same difference as between a lily and a nautilus. The Parthenon is beautiful and stationary, but ships are beautiful, and they can move.”

“It does seem as if the ship of the future was to be like a giant poloni, or a vulgar imitation of a turbot, with horns fuming out blackness on its back. But, as I think I remarked before, we do not want ships only for their beauty.”

“No.”

“And so we change them to gather speed, or to get power, or to save expenditure.”

“And we do want poetry for its beauty, you mean. Yes, only for its beauty; for its moral power over us—its teaching, comforting, and elevating power all depend on its beauty. We know all this, and yet things come to pass.”

“Nothing particular is coming to pass that I can see, excepting that just lately some poets and people who think they are poets are getting excessively ingenious. The French never had much poetry in them, but they were exceedingly ingenious, as the old Italians were. And this sort of thing is being naturalized here. Is there any danger in it?”

“Yes; because it makes the form of so much more consequence than the spirit, that it will end in taking the writing of verse out of the hands of the poets, and we shall end by admiring ingenious, artful rhymes more than a wonderful or splendid thought.”

“I should have thought a poet, if there

was anything in him, would have been able to write even in that style."

"But not better than an ingenious scholar. The future poets will be born in chains, and they used, especially in England, to be born free. It will surely be a great disadvantage to be born under the dominion of a culture of the wrong sort."

"Well, I pity the poet of the future: he will have to look out."

"The more art the less nature. I think the poet of the future will be like a wild bird in a handsome cage. He will beat his wings against the wires instead of singing. And as all these old formal and difficult descriptions of verse come in, the themes must be carefully chosen to suit them. Lyrical poetry with us has always been rather a wild thing: now we seem inclined to tame it. The French partridge you know has nearly exterminated the English. So I think the French and Italian forms, in which we can only after

all write a finer kind of *vers de société*, will prevail to smother the English lyric."

"Well," said Lancey, who did not care a straw for poetry, "then let them, if they can; we have got more poetry already written than we know what to do with."

"I shouldn't wonder," answered Don John, "and so we begin to want a change; but I must say, Charlotte, that I think the indications you speak of are very few and faint."

"Like the straw which shows the way of the wind."

Mrs. Johnstone was at the door by this time. Lancey had felt sure that she would leave the room when this discussion began to flag, for he knew whom she would call to follow her.

"Charlotte."

He was right!

"Aunt Estelle."

"I want you, dear one."

Charlotte got up, and the door was shut

after them. The glorious soft orange of the sunset was reflected only on the red carpet, and on the pale blue sofa. Charlotte's white gown was what it had rested on so beautifully, and her absence made everything look dull.

It came to Lancey almost as an inspiration that he himself was to be the theme of "mother's" discourse with Charlotte; that he had looked a good deal at Charlotte, and that "mother" did not care that he should.

He was a little nettled. She was quite needlessly careful! It was true he frequently forgot what a bad fellow he had been, but then he only forgot what she had never known. Lancey thought a good deal about this during the evening and the next day; but Charlotte did not seem to avoid him; she played to him in the morning, and in the afternoon she took her share of reading aloud to him with Naomi.

Charlotte generally wore white; either

the sunshine was clearer or her gown was even whiter than usual that afternoon, for as she passed down the garden grass walk she looked like a pillar of snow. She gathered a red rose-bud, and went to the green gate, and leaning her elbows on it looked out.

Some thought, both sweet and strange to her, was lying at her heart, its evidence seemed to give a brooding beauty to her eyes, and she pouted slightly, as she often did when she was lost in cogitation.

So she was looking when Don John came up the field. His father went into the house by the usual entrance, but he, remarking her, came on and approached her as she leaned on the gate.

And she was so quiet, that though she looked at him, he wanted to partake of the joy of her presence as she was, rather than to accost her and make her move. He stood for the moment on one side of the gate and she on the other. It was such a

slight affair, only three green rails and a latch.

Here he had first discovered her to be his love, and that on her answer to this hung his destiny.

The folds of her white robe were not stirred by any wind, all was as still as a dream. She had the rose-bud between her hands, and she touched it with her lips.

He had drawn off his glove when first he marked her, for sometimes when they met if he held out his hand she would put hers into it unaware. Now, he hardly knew by what impulse he took off his hat too, and laid it on the grass. What was she thinking of? what did this mean? The rosebud was at her lips again, her shining eyes looked into his, and she said, "Dearest, shall I put this into your coat?"

It was such an astonishment. "Let me kiss it first," he stammered, for he could hardly think this real. How could any

young man so much in love have been so unready !

Her hands were busy for a moment with the breast of his coat. "I might envy the rose if you did," she whispered ; and when he had kissed her, she put her arms round his neck and returned the kiss.

How sudden and how vast a change !

But nothing, when one has it, appears so natural as delight.

They went through the garden together, hand in hand, and when Charlotte had said, "Aunt Estelle has told me all the story," there seemed to be nothing more to explain, and nothing so sweet as silence ; for it was manifest to both that the world was their own—a new world not learned, and unexplored.

How can one utter the world ?

No, "silence is golden," for at least it does this marvellous new world no wrong.

During dinner the musing, ecstatic silence was hardly broken at all.

In the course of the evening they began to consider how anything so remarkable as their love could be communicated to the family. They need not have troubled themselves, everybody knew. Even Master Fred, who generally stood upon his dignity, was not above stopping in the corridor that night to bestow upon his elder brother a neat and carefully modelled wink, and a very large smile—a smile in fact that spread over his face almost from ear to ear.

A chuckling, rolling sound burst from the young gentleman's chest. It was as if a small earthquake heaved when it was young.

He darted into his room and hastily bolted his door, his usual way when he had been "cheeky," for when that ceremony had been forgotten, Don John not unfrequently burst it open and threw at him anything that came to hand.

Once or twice he had elaborately screwed him in, so that, as Mary said,—

“ If the fruit-ladder had not been long enough to let him out the next morning, he must have been fed through the key-hole.”

But such are the ordinary ways of brothers when one is several years older than the other, and they are as these were, pretty good friends.

And Lancey knew. Somehow or other he thought it was rather unfair,—and yet he was very much improved. On the whole he was very penitent. When he came to review and consider matters, he did not see how if they had known all, they could have let him win Charlotte. And next he considered that there was reason enough against such a thing even in what they did know. This was a great advance to be made by such a young man as Lancey. Another advance was his not being afraid of his father's advice and prayers, he liked them.

But his visit to “ the house ” was a great anxiety to Don John, and even to himself.

He felt that he was always liable to be hunted up by those who had known him as John Ward, and to whom he had owed small sums. Little bills might have been forgotten. His parents might yet know of his dreadful disgrace; and the fear of this, no less than his true penitence, left him on the whole humble and thankful.

So several weeks went on, and at last it was decided that Lancey should take a sea-voyage as the best chance of perfectly restoring his health, and that his "mamma" of course should accompany him. Mr. Johnstone found funds for this, and Don John arranged it. They were to go to Tasmania. And somehow Mrs. Johnstone felt, and yet could give no actual reason for it, that Lancey did not intend to return to his own country, and Don John did not intend that he should.

Lancey was an old traveller, he thought nothing of the voyage; and yet when he went away from "the house," taking leave

of them all he betrayed, for the first time in his life, very deep emotion. It was impossible he could stay; not even Don John knew that as well as he did. And yet it was bitter to turn himself out of Paradise.

He felt how much dearer they all and every one of them were, than the poor woman whose all he was, and who was to go with him more because he needed her services than because he cared for her companionship.

She, too, was much improved. She had been told all by Don John. She knew the extreme difficulty with which he had found money to pay Lancey's bills, and yet how he had refused to let Mr. Johnstone know anything.

She blushed for Lancey over some of these bills, and felt that it was like mother, like son. He was untrustworthy, dishonest, and deceitful, as she had been.

Don John was the soul of honour and uprightness. She sank in her own esteem

when he came near her—and yet he was rather kind too.

In the course of a few more weeks all was ready.

The two mothers went on board, and Don John was there and Mr. Johnstone. Then while these and Lancey went over the ship, the one mother wept and said to the other that she hoped she would forgive her.

“My husband, Collingwood, has said to me many a time that our having been suffered to plant such a doubt in you was enough to make you feel almost as if the ways of Providence were hard.”

She sobbed.

“I did almost feel something like that at first,” was the answer. “But I’ve got my own, and the doubts and distress have long been over.”

“Ay,” was the answer, “and you’ve had all the good and innocent years of the other too. I never had him back till I knew

he would be a misery and a disgrace to me."

"You speak too strongly," said Mrs. Johnstone. "Poor Lancey is very much improved."

"But I've brought it all on myself," sobbed Mrs. Ward. "I own it; I humbly ask your pardon. I've had my punishment."

"I do forgive you."

"It is but reason you should, for we both know you've got your own. But even if it was not so, why still you've got the best of it. It is not so; but if it was, I should have given you my good child and got your bad one."

"Yes; I have felt that too; but you must not think that any distressing doubt remains. A mother's instinct, both in your heart and mine, soon grew too strong for any mistake to be possible."

So they parted friends, and even with a kiss.

It was Christmas when Lancey sailed.

That was a pleasant winter, even Naomi did not think it long. She saw her lover frequently, and she was to be married in March.

She knew by this time, because her mother had told her, from whom was to come her dower, and Fred knew at whose instance and whose charges he was to go to Oxford that his really brilliant talents might have scope. And Mr. Johnstone, feeling easy as to some matters which had weighed on his mind, improved again in health, so that it was a very cheerful winter for them all.

And Charlotte was brought to say after much persuasion, that the double-blossomed cherry was her favourite flower, and most appropriate for a bridal. Charlotte was very demure. Sometimes she held Don John remote; their engagement, in short, by no means went on according to its beginning. But her mother was to come over that spring for six months, and he thought he knew what for.

There was not half so much crying at Naomi's wedding as at Marjorie's. They were said to behave extremely well, and the children from the houses strewed the aisles and the church path with yellow and white and purple crocuses.

As they all stood in the porch to see Naomi off, she said when she came down the steps and saw Charlotte standing by Don John,—

“Be good to him, Charlotte. There's nobody like our Don John.”

Charlotte's dimple came, but she blushed. In a minute or two the bride was gone, and the whole party excepting herself, Don John, and his mother had rushed back into the house to the dining-room windows to watch the carriage as it turned up the road.

These stood yet in the porch. The mother and Charlotte on the upper step and Don John on the lower.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Johnstone, smiling,

though tears were in her eyes, "there's nobody like our Don John."

Her hand was on his shoulder.

"Oh, mother," he exclaimed, turning and looking at them, "if you didn't all make so much of a fellow—"

"Charlotte would not need telling to be good to him, is that it?" she inquired.

"On the contrary," said Charlotte, "if his merits were not so frequently set before me I might never have found them out."

She laughed, and her blue eyes danced. How lovely she looked in all her fair adornments !

"That was a very unkind speech," said the mother, smiling. "You must say something to make up for it."

"Yes, to please you, Aunt Estelle!" said Charlotte demurely. Then she pursed up her rosy mouth, and first bestowing on him a kiss under his mother's eyes, she said, "There's nobody like our Don John, and I always think so."

Our Don John. He was always to be theirs ; first their joy and then their comfort, next their aid, and in the course of years all they had of honour and distinction.

And yet, after all—though in this world they were never to know it, though he was bound to them by more than common dues of service done, and love bestowed—after all, this was the carpenter's son ; and that Lancey, who but for him would more than once have been their sorrow and their disgrace, he was the true Don John. But he was to trouble them no more for ever. He was cast upon “the mercy of the Most Merciful.” He was quiet in the keeping of the sea.

THE END.

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